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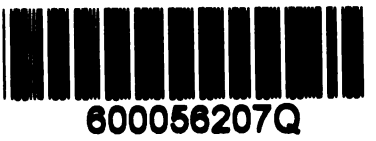
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IN
LOVE AND WAR


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IN LOVE AND WAR.

"There was a May, and a weel-far'd May,
Lived high up in yon glen;
Her name was Katherine Janfarie,
She was courted by mony men."

The Ballad of Katherine Janfarie.

IN LOVE AND WAR.

A Romance.

BY

CHARLES GIBBON,

AUTHOR OF "IN HONOUR BOUND," "ROBIN GRAY,"
"WHAT WILL THE WORLD SAY?" "FOR LACK OF GOLD," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.





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IN LOVE AND WAR.

CHAPTER I.

THE COMBAT.

"'I will not fight with you, MacVan,
You never me offended;
And if I aught to you have done,
I'll own my fault and mend it.'

"'Does this become so brave a knight?
Does blood so much surprise you?
And if you do refuse to fight
I'll like a dog chastise you.'"

Sir Niel and MacVan.

THE men made no movement to advance upon their victim. Acting evidently on the command of their chief, they only stepped

forth from their hiding places, and halted with arms in readiness for action. The object seemed to be to make him aware of his position, and of the impossibility of escape rather than to assault him suddenly, and so take advantage of his surprise to despatch him before he could use any strategy in his defence.

This purpose was certainly accomplished as satisfactorily as the framer of the scheme could have desired. Lamington instantly became conscious of the whole peril in which he stood, and bitterly enraged with himself for having fallen so blindly into the trap.

Janfarie waited to note the effect of this revelation of his power, and his followers stood like dark executioners of a dire purpose—silent, motionless, and ready to do their fell work at the slightest signal from their leader.

Lamington having surveyed the men, turned with a scornful look to his betrayer.

"Your treachery has succeeded," he said, calmly; "and now that you have caught me in this ambush, what is your purpose?"

"My purpose you already know; as for the treachery, as you call it, none would have been used against you had not your nice sense of kinship rendered you so averse to cross weapons with me, that no choice was left save to place you in a position from which nothing but your sword could rescue you."

"And it shall do so, since there is no help for it. But stand you aside; for Katherine's sake do not force me to the risk of staining my hand with your blood."

"It is with me alone you have to deal."

"Stand you aside, I say, and let your four cut-throats do their worst upon me;

but at least let me fall by any hand save one so near to her as yours."

This earnest appeal only roused the angry nature of Janfarie to contempt.

"If you are worthy to bear a sword—if you have any claim to be called a man, you will draw and defend yourself, without further words."

"But not against you."

"Ay, against me; for, by heaven, and by the vow I pledged to my dead father, you shall fall by no other hand than mine. You call me traitor, but I give you a fair chance of life."

"A chance you know I dare not accept."

"I give you the chance and you must accept. You see those men—at any moment during our journey hither any one of them might have struck you to the earth; even now, where you stand, they might rush upon you, and if you escaped

them, they would be clumsier fellows than they have proved themselves. But that would not satisfy me."

"What will satisfy you?"

"Nothing but your fall under my hand —there is no other way to redeem the pledge I gave my father; there is no other way to atone for his fate. Draw, then, for I am your only foe. Over my dead body you may pass freely, for yonder fellows have strict commands to lay no touch upon you if I fall, and to give you free passage, unless you attempt to fly before you have proved yourself against me."

The Borderer spoke with a proud, passionate utterance; and it must be understood that his deadly hate and his apparently unreasonable persistence in attempting to wreak vengeance for his father's fate upon Lamington was a characteristic of the feuds of the times. If a man

fell in fight his friends declared feud, not only against the man who had actually struck the blow, but also against his kin; and more especially against the one who might be presumed to have been the originator of the quarrel in which the first blood had been shed.

Thus Richard Janfarie was simply obeying the barbarous law which regulated feuds when he persistently sought to retaliate upon Lamington the death of Sir Hugh; but his rancour was heightened and goaded to a species of frenzy by the cunning suggestions of Cochrane. Something of this Lamington was conscious of when he made a last attempt to pacify the foe with whom he would so gladly have made terms for Katherine's sake.

"I hope the merit of my sword has been proved too often," he said, almost sadly, "for even a foe to doubt my right to bear it ——"

"By the Sacred Mother I shall doubt it much," cried Janfarie, hotly, "if you do not show it to me speedily."

"Not yet, Janfarie—at least not till I have spoken. You have for the last hour or more had my life at your mercy—any of your fellows might have taken it whilst I was passing through the glen. You have not availed yourself of that treacherous advantage, and I recognize some generosity in your forbearance despite the hatred with which you pursue me."

He spoke rapidly and earnestly; but he paused to note the impression his words made upon the hearer.

He was disappointed, for Janfarie only frowned and muttered impatiently:

"Well?"

"Well, give me time to satisfy you that you have judged me wrongly; give me time to save your sister from the hands

of the knave whose counsels have poisoned your mind; and if I do not prove to you how false are all his pledges, and how base are all his motives, then call upon me when you will, and where you will, and denounce me as a coward if I do not meet you."

Janfarie was not apparently affected in the least by the sincerity of this appeal. He listened with the restless bearing of one whose mind is quite made up, and whose resolution cannot be altered.

"Have you done?" he said.

"All that I can say is said," answered Lamington.

"On my soul, I am glad of that; for now, perhaps, you will show yourself better than I begin to think you are. Be Cochrane what he may, I have pledged myself to him whose sword I carry, that when you and I should meet, one of us should bite

the dust. No more words, then, for they will be useless."

Lamington slowly unfastened his cloak, and permitted it to drop to the ground. Janfarie, with an ejaculation of satisfaction at seeing him prepare for the combat, rested the point of his weapon on the sod, and waited eagerly for him to cry ready.

Gordon found himself placed in a cruel dilemma.

Already denounced as an accomplice in her father's fall, how could he ever look in her face if it should happen that her brother's fate also should be laid to his charge? Yet how could he help himself? The very necessity to speed on his way to her aid had led him into the trap, and left him no alternative save to draw upon Janfarie or leave her at the mercy of Cochrane.

"Not ready yet?" muttered Janfarie,

exasperated by the slow movements of his antagonist; "by the Sacred Mother, I never knew a man so slow to defend all that was most precious to him!"

Lamington, with a reluctance he had never before experienced, unsheathed his sword.

"One moment," he said, coldly, for the relentless fury of Janfarie was beginning to quicken his pulse; "one moment—if you should fall, will it be necessary for me to make way through your guards also?"

Janfarie shouted to the men—

"Hearken, lads!"

They made signals of attention.

"I have given you my command, that if I fall this gentleman is to pass without let or hindrance from you. Pledge him your word that you will make no attempt to bar his way."

"We promise, since you command it," answered the men.

"You hear," continued Janfarie, turning to Gordon, "and you can trust a Borderer's word."

"I accept the pledge."

"You are prepared at last, then?"

Lamington inclined his head sadly, and the swords were crossed.

There was a pause, during which the combatants, foot to foot, eyed each other narrowly, and appeared to await the first movement to ward or to thrust.

Lamington's gaze was calm, steady, and sorrowful; he had no humour for the contest, and the chances of the issue seemed to be all against him in consequence.

Janfarie's eyes glittered with a sort of ferocious resolution; but he maintained a steadfast bearing. His passion was intense, but it did not render him unwary; his

thirst for vengeance was deep, but it did not make him so hasty in seeking its achievement as to give his opponent the advantage—at least, whatever advantage his excessive eagerness might have afforded, was more than counterbalanced by the other's unwillingness to take action.

At length Janfarie slowly, but with a giant's power, pressed down the weapon of his antagonist—pressed it down until it nearly touched the ground, and the breasts of both were left uncovered. He made a rapid feint as if to strike the sword arm of Lamington, and followed it by a vigorous thrust at his heart.

But the feint was understood, and the thrust was parried with perfect calmness, and with a force which for an instant left Janfarie at the mercy of his generous foe.

Uttering a sharp, short exclamation of rage, he renewed the attack with more

vigour and with no less skill than before. But with superior skill Lamington maintained his defensive tactics; and once more he broke down the guard of his enemy with such force that he might have run him through; and again he would not avail himself of his fairly won opportunity of deciding the victory.

This generosity had anything rather than a soothing influence upon Janfarie. Instead of serving to open his eyes to the malignance of his own course, and to the kindliness of that of the man who was so unwillingly opposed to him, it quickened his rage to a degree of frenzy.

He was rapidly losing the self-possession with which he had opened the combat, and which placed him on equal terms with Gordon; he was even losing the control of his weapon, and cut and thrust with a blind wrath, which with any other

person opposed to him would have cost him his life before many minutes had elapsed.

"You are playing with me," he shouted, passionately, whilst he continued his fierce assault. "Strike, when you can, for by my father's soul you shall have no mercy from me. Take your fair vantage, then, and save yourself—you shall go scathless for the deed."

"That cannot be," answered Gordon, calmly; "for when you fall beneath my hand, the same blow which cuts you down severs the bond which links your sister to me."

"Curse her—curse you for the woe you have both wrought our house! Guard well, for I will strike at you whilst I have power to raise my hand."

His passion seemed to give him new strength, and he broke down the guard

of his opponent repeatedly; but despite his strength and fury he was not able to thrust or strike before the guard was resumed. He, however, succeeded in inflicting several slight wounds, one upon the sword arm, and the other upon the left shoulder of Lamington.

The latter now began to move backward, still defending himself dexterously; but the movement was such an apparent sign of weakness, that Janfarie gave vent to a short cry of satisfaction.

His satisfaction was excited not only by this sign of yielding on the part of his foe, but also on account of his observation, that he was moving back upon the deep pit, or murder-hole, which was half filled with water, and into which Lamington would certainly stumble if he did not presently observe his peril.

That he had no chance of doing, for he

was obliged to devote his whole attention to his defence, and Janfarie redoubled his exertions, in order to render it impossible for even a momentary glance to betray the peril which was to relieve him of one whose skill kept him so completely at bay, in spite of all his efforts.

Defending himself at every step, Lamington continued to move backward, direct toward the pit, which seemed to be yawning to receive him.

His object throughout the combat had been to exhaust his foe; and that object seeming to be near attainment, he now sought to lead him beyond the range of the four Borderers, so that he might disarm him and escape.

He was within three paces of the mouth of the pit, when Janfarie, too eager to seize the opportunity which was offered to him, made a furious lounge at his opponent,

but Lamington swiftly carried down the point of his sword, which struck upon a stone, and being pressed upon by all the weight of Janfarie's body, the weapon snapped and broke near the hilt.

For an instant he stood glaring in dumb fury upon the remnant of the sword which he still grasped in his hand. Then he hurled the useless hilt from him, and it fell into the pit, splashing amongst the water. Before it had sunk he had drawn a large Spanish poiniard—a gift from Cochrane—and sprang madly upon Lamington.

The latter had no time to weigh consequences, but with the instinct of self-preservation raised the point of his sword, which penetrated the descending arm of his foe, and diverted the deadly thrust, aimed at his heart. The dagger dropped from Janfarie's hand; and Lamington,

quickly withdrew his weapon from the wound.

Janfarie instantly with his left hand clutched at his opponent's throat and endeavoured with one mighty effort to accomplish his purpose by hurling him into the pit.

Lamington dropped his sword and grappled with the frenzied man. The fingers had closed upon his throat, he felt their grasp tightening like a vice, and he knew that a few minutes would suffice to stifle him. There was a short, sharp struggle: but the Borderer was exhausted by his passionate exertions, whilst his antagonist was still calm and vigorous. They approached the very edge of the murder-hole, and then Lamington, making a desperate effort to relieve himself, flung his antagonist from him.

The man reeled an instant, made a wild

effort to regain his balance, and then pitched head foremost into the pit, the dark, muddy water closing over him.

There was a shout of dismay and wrath from the men who had been mute spectators of this fierce combat, and they hastened from their posts to the spot where their leader had fallen.

But they had not made more than a dozen paces toward him before Lamington had recovered from the surprise with which he had been affected by the unmeditated fatality of the struggle. Calling to the men to hasten, he leaped into the water, and having noticed the spot where his foe had sunk, he soon grasped the insensible body and dragged it to the surface.

The sides of the pit were straight and slimy, and the depth of the water being probably twelve feet, Lamington could

neither obtain a footing nor climb out of the hole with his burden without assistance.

He kept afloat, however, by considerable exertion, and at length the Borderers bent over the edge, looking down on him as much in wonder at his singular attempt to rescue his foe, as in anxiety for the fate of their chief.

"Reach down the shaft of one of your axes and draw us up," cried Lamington.

Two of the men immediately obeyed this command. Kneeling on the edge of the pit, they reached him the stout pole of a long halberd, which the knight grasped tightly, and the men dragged him slowly up with his apparently lifeless companion.

The Borderers, with gloomy countenances, gathered round him as he laid their chief upon the sod; and when they observed a red gash on the brow of the insensible

man, and the bloody marks on the sword arm, they muttered angrily amongst themselves. The promise which they had given to let the victor go scathless, threatened to be poorly observed, if observed at all.

Lamington paid no attention to these unpleasant symptoms of a breach of faith. His eyes were fixed upon the ghastly form at his feet, begrimed with mud, the face and a portion of the clothes discoloured with blood. He was himself dripping wet and besmeared with ooze; but he had no thought for his own discomfort — no thought even of the mission which had been thus unhappily interrupted; he saw only the ghastly face of Katherine's brother, and his only thought was that by this act he had placed her for ever beyond his reach.

Evidently, in falling into the pit, Janfarie's head had struck against some

stone, which had caused the wound on his brow, and his present insensibility.

"He is badly hurt, but not dead," cried Lamington, dropping on his knees beside him, and seeking anxiously for some indication of life.

He drew a long breath of relief when he discovered that the heart was still beating, although very faintly. He hastily directed one of the men to run to the nearest streamlet and fill his steel cap with water. Then he thrust his hand into the pouch of his jerkin and drew out a fine silk handkerchief, with which, when the Borderer had returned with the water, he bathed the brow of the wounded chief, and finally bandaged it.

The men looked on in gloomy silence.

Janfarie presently began to show symptoms of reanimation by breathing heavily. As soon as Lamington perceived that, he sprang to his feet.

"You have your horses at hand, I suppose?" he said, in a quick undertone, addressing the men.

One of them—he who had gone for the water, and who seemed to be the most good-natured, as well as clearest-headed of the party—answered:

"Ay, master, they are close by."

"Convey your leader, then, with all gentle care to the tower of Lamington, which stands near the Ken, and to the south of Craigdarroch. Give those in charge this token, and they will attend to your master as faithfully as he would be cared for in his own home."

He had cut from his belt one of the small silver ornaments, on which was stamped the ensign of his house—a boar's head—and that he handed to the Borderer.

"You think he is likely to come round, then?" said the man.

"Assuredly, or I should be ill-contented in leaving him. Look, he is moving—he must not see me when he recovers. Here are four gold pieces to help you all to think better of me than as your master's foe. Look well to him, on your lives."

The presentation of the money was a species of generosity which the rough troopers could thoroughly appreciate; it immediately altered their view of the transaction they had witnessed, and the upshot of which they had been disposed to resent, notwithstanding their pledge to the contrary. Three of the men bluntly expressed their satisfaction, but the fourth —one of those who had received a drubbing at Dumfries—accepted his gift in surly silence.

But Lamington was indifferent, he was only anxious now to escape before Janfarie recovered sufficiently to be able to make any effort to stay him.

He hastily searched for his sword, hat, and cloak, and having found them, cast one last glance toward Katherine's brother, and hurried away from the Druid's Circle, to seek his horse and continue his journey. It was not until he had reached the den that he discovered the absence of the hound Stark. He whistled shrilly for the dog and called it by name, but without effect; and at last he was obliged to conclude that Stark, annoyed by the neglect with which its repeated warnings had been received, had deserted him.

He soon regained the road, and there he mounted his horse. After pausing a few minutes, and listening for any sound that might indicate the approach of Muckle Will, without being gratified by any such indication, he urged his horse forward.

He was too eager to regain some of the time so disagreeably wasted to think any-

thing of the discomforts of his wet and soiled habiliments. He proposed obtaining a change at the first hostelry or friendly house which he might reach. The change would add to his comfort, and would at the same time serve as a useful disguise until he reached Linlithgow, where he might obtain garments suitable for his appearance at the palace.

He was disturbed by many conflicting thoughts, and it was not until he had ridden several miles that he remembered the tablet containing the list of friendly names with which the Abbot had entrusted him. He hurriedly searched his pouch for the list, and to his dismay he discovered that it was gone.

He remembered the warning and solicitude with which the Abbot had presented it to him, and; with a jerk of the rein, he brought his horse to a sudden stand,

uncertain whether to proceed or turn back.

He searched his pouch again; he searched every corner in which he might have stowed the tablet, but it was gone; and it became clear that in the recent struggle he must have lost it.

His only hope was that it might have fallen—as was, indeed, most probable—into the pit during the struggle at its edge; but in any case it was too late to turn back now, for the tablet would be by this time in the hands of the enemy, if they were to find it at all; and Katherine's safety was of more importance to him than that of all the world beside.



CHAPTER II.

LINLITHGOW.

"Of all the palaces so fair,
Built for the royal dwelling,
In Scotland, far beyond compare,
Linlithgow is excelling;
And in its park in jovial June,
How sweet the merry linnet's tune,
How blithe the blackbird's lay!
The wild buck-bells from ferny brake,
The coot dives merry on the lake,
The saddest heart might pleasure take
To see all nature gay."

Marmion.

UNDER any circumstances the ride from Kells to Linlithgow was a long and tiresome one to be performed without a halt for proper

rest; but it was especially wearisome to Katherine whose mind was distracted by the terror of the purpose for which her brother had remained behind, and by the companionship of Cochrane.

She glanced backwards repeatedly, but her eyes were not relieved by any sign of following friends. Her pulse quickened at every sound of approaching horses; but only to relax into a state of sickening weariness as the sound faded away or a stray horseman appeared in the opposite direction. The fatigue of the journey was a merciful hardship to her, for it helped to stultify the poignancy of the pangs which her reflections inflicted. Otherwise the dread of what might be passing amidst the dreary Glenkens, and the dread of what might be the upshot of this excursion, would have proved too much for her to hold up against with any degree of calm-

ness. And that was the quality of which she felt most in need at this crisis.

Cochrane was true to his word so far that he showed no inclination to tarry on the road; indeed, he had good reasons for desiring to stand in the presence of his royal master at the earliest possible moment. First, that his version of the recent events might obtain the advantage of forestalling any other which might be laid before his Majesty; this he knew would be a considerable advantage in the present instance, for King James was apt to form an opinion on the impulse of the moment, and to adhere to it obstinately afterwards in spite of any proofs to the contrary that might be offered to him.

His second reason for haste was one of graver import, for it related to certain intrigues involving the honour and lives of high personages, and the arrival at the

palace of the Abbot Panther before him might prove fatal to the schemes on which his ambition had ventured its boldest flight.

On these grounds he was as eager to push forward as Katherine could have desired. He maintained toward her a coldly respectful bearing, scarcely addressing a word to her except when at several halting places he requested her to partake of some refreshment. But although she could take little food of any kind, he used no persuasion; he left her as freely to her own humour in that respect as on the road he left her free to her own thoughts.

He still carefully retained the leading rèin, but otherwise he did not attempt to interfere with her. By the time they were nearing Lanark, the fatigue had begun to tell upon her, and displayed itself in an

unusual pallor and a sunken, worn look in the eyes.

This effect he observed, and he was well-pleased even in such a petty way as this to punish her for the scorn she had cast on him. Besides, with a wearied body, and an exhausted mind, she would be less formidable when presented to the King than she might have been with all her faculties fresh and alert.

At Lanark it became necessary to change horses; and as only four could be procured, after an hour's halt, Cochrane and Katherine, followed by only two of the men, continued the route to Linlithgow. The remaining Borderers were quartered at the Lanark hostelry for the night, under commands to ride forward in the morning, by which time their nags would be sufficiently rested.

It was late in the evening when they

rode into the town, and in the darkness they passed along the main street with its irregular lines of buildings, the gables of which fronted the thoroughfare, without much heed being paid to them by the burgesses, who, during the residence of the court at the palace, were accustomed to the sound of traffic at all hours.

The city—for so it was legally designated—was of much higher importance, although somewhat less in extent in those days than in the present. The convenience afforded by the surrounding district for the sports of hunting and falconry had rendered the town a favourite place of resort for Majesty and its troupe of attendant courtiers. The armorial bearings of the city represent a black greyhound bitch, tied to a tree, and suggest at once the origin of the place. Tradition, however, ascribes the emblem to another and less pleasant

source—namely, to a witch who was in the habit of assuming the form of a hound the better to carry out her evil intents upon the inhabitants, and who at length, being caught in her unnatural form, was firmly bound to a tree by a cord which had been dipped in sanctified water. After that the beldame was unable to release herself, notwithstanding her friendly relations to the powers of darkness, and she had been left to perish whilst the city prospered.

A Celtic explanation of the emblem finds its meaning in the name of the place—that is, *lin-liath-cu*, the Lake of the Greyhound. But a famous historian claims a Gothic derivation for the name—that is, *lin-lyth-gow*, or the Lake of the Great Vale. Be that as it may, the beauty of the district, with its undulating and wooded plains, coursed by glittering streamlets, traversed by the Avon, and bordered by the Forth,

whilst northward rise towering and snow-covered mountains, renders it one of the most picturesque straths in Scotland.

The palace stands on an elevated promontory, the foot of which is lapped by the loch. The building was originally nothing more than a square pile, or peel as it was called, and was merely used as a place of defence. In 1300 it fell into the hands of Edward I. of England, who, after causing it to be strengthened by numerous repairs, garrisoned it as one of the citadels by which he hoped to retain dominion over Scotland.

The stratagem by which the sturdy farmer, William Binnock, introduced a number of armed men into the stronghold under the disguise of a cart-load of hay, and wrested the fortress from Edward's soldiers, forms one of the most interesting episodes of the Bruce's struggle.

In 1414 the town and palace were accidentally burned down; the former having undergone a similar calamity only three years previously. The reign of the Stuarts had then begun, and the palace, with its royal chapel, were rebuilt with greater magnificence than ever. Successive Stuarts added to the architectural beauties of the building, and in the time of James III. it was one of the best appointed of the royal palaces.

On this account, and also because the lordship of the town had been settled upon her, it was the favourite residence of Margaret of Denmark; and King James III. so far approved the taste of his queen as to spend much of his time at the same place. The palace when completed—which was not until the time of James VI.—formed a square with an interior quadrangle, which was overlooked by the principal windows.

In the centre stood a fountain, one of the many which gave rise to the old rhyme,

"Linlithgow for wells,
Stirling for bells."

Late as the hour was, Cochrane advanced to the palace with the air of a man who is confident of his reception. He approached by the ancient entrance at the eastern side, where his summons was immediately answered by the warder, who, recognizing him, gave his party admission without question.

They rode into the court, and halting near the fountain, Sir Robert leaped to the ground and proffered his assistance to Katherine; but she, although tired enough in body and mind, still shrank from his touch, and hastily slipped from the saddle unaided.

Without appearing to notice this fresh sign of repugnance, Cochrane turned to the

men and directed them to take the horses to the stables, and then proceed to the guard-room to wait his further orders.

"Now, madam," he said, "I will conduct you to apartments where you can prepare yourself to attend the presence of his Majesty."

He spoke with cold politeness, and did not offer his hand, for which consideration she was thankful.

"Will their Majesties see me to-night at so late an hour?" she queried, eagerly.

"That I cannot answer; but be assured I will use my utmost power to gratify your desire at the earliest convenient moment."

A company of the royal guard at this moment crossed the quadrangle, their bright steel breast-plates and basinets glistening in the light of half a dozen torches borne by as many common soldiers who preceded the guard, and their heavy armour

clanged loudly as they marched across the stone pavement.

Cochrane waited for the guard to pass, and as they did so the officer recognized and saluted him, casting a curious glance backward at the shrinking lady who stood by his side.

"This way, madam," said Sir Robert, and he preceded her to a large doorway in the west wing of the palace.

CHAPTER III.

THE KING'S FAVOURITES.

"Within 'twas brilliant all and light,
A thronging scene of figures bright;
It glowed on Ellen's dazzled sight
As when the setting sun has given
Ten thousand hues to summer even;
And from their tissue fancy frames
Aerial knights and fairy dames."

Lady of the Lake.

THEY were admitted by a porter, who paid obsequious attention to Cochrane. All the attendants whom they encountered on their passage along several corridors and up three staircases to the apartments of Sir

Robert, saluted the King's favourite with profound respect. He had the power to make or mar the gentlemen lacqueys, and so they paid court to him on every available occasion, receiving in return, as now, a slight bend of the head or a patronizing glance, according to the rank each personage held in the royal household, and in the esteem of the great man. Some he passed without the slightest acknowledgment of their presence; but they were only a few whom he suspected of entertaining kindly wishes towards his rivals.

In passing them his visage assumed the cold, inscrutable expression habitual to it; but they were very few who were thus treated, for Sir Robert, in the midst of all his ambitious thoughts, never lost an opportunity to ingratiate himself with the humblest who approached him, prudently calculating that it was impossible to guess

from what quarter he might need assistance at important junctures of his career.

Katherine was not used to court; she had indeed rarely mixed with other society than that afforded by the families of her father's kinsfolk; and it was natural that she should experience some sense of awe in finding herself for the first time under the same roof with royalty. This feeling was heightened by the peculiar circumstances in which she was placed, especially by the fact that she was conducted hither by one whom she had so much reason to fear and to dislike.

It was also natural, under the circumstances, that she should be impressed by the evident respect paid to Cochrane; and he, as if desirous of making that impression as deep as possible, seemed to lead her through the most frequented corridors, whilst her cheeks were tingling

with shame at being compelled to follow him.

The height of the building was five storeys, and the apartments of Sir Robert Cochrane were on the third floor—a place of honour as well as of some state. They were within convenient reach of the king's own retiring chambers; and they had been occupied at one time by the brother of his Majesty, the Earl of Mar. The possession of this dignified habitation was only one of the many favours which Cochrane had obtained from his royal master to the great scandal and chagrin of the nobles whose rights and privileges had been, as they believed, contumaciously set aside for the advancement of a nameless upstart.

But Cochrane was a man who, whilst he would not court danger, was prepared to brave it to any extent in the accomplishment of his ambitious designs. He saw

the frowns with which he was regarded, and the jealousies entertained towards him by all except those who could stoop to buy his services or to play the sycophant with him. He was indifferent; those who frowned he watched with unwavering eyes, and those who fawned he treated with patronage or submission according to their degree, whilst he lost no opportunity of availing himself of everybody's service to his own gain.

Those who stood in his way, whether of high or low degree, he swept from his path by force of some of the cunning stratagems in which his brain was fertile. He had even been bold enough to assail the position of the royal brothers, Albany and Mar, with what fatal result will presently appear.

Having conducted Katherine into his apartments, he bade her, in his coldly respectful manner, to consider them as her

own in the meanwhile; but he did not acquaint her that they were recognized as his during the residence of the King at the palace.

The chambers consisted of a reception or sitting-room—large, and elegantly furnished, with heavy French tapestry covering the walls, and three windows commanded a view of the principal court; next, a small robing-room and a handsomely-fitted retiring-room.

The three apartments, and especially the first, were furnished even more luxuriously than when they had been occupied by the King's brother; for one of the prominent peculiarities of Cochrane's character—one made up of so much daring and cunning—was an almost womanish delight in all the refinements of apparel, and of the appurtenances of his residence. In this, too, he displayed considerable taste, for his resi-

dence in Italy and France, combined with much natural aptitude, had enabled him to catch the trick of adornment, which depends not so much on the lavish expenditure of money, as upon the artistic propriety of arrangement.

The King's own apartments were not more elegant in appearance than these, although they were crowded with articles of fifty times the value. This delicacy of taste was one of Cochrane's chief recommendations in the eyes of the monarch.

In obedience to a signal from Sir Robert, an attendant had followed him, and was now standing at the door awaiting instructions. He was directed to supply the lady with refreshments, and to find some handmaiden who could attend upon her.

The man—a tall, dark-featured fellow, named Ross, who had been raised to his present post by Cochrane, and who was

consequently devoted to his service—bowed silently and retired.

Katherine, fatigued by her long journey, and somewhat bewildered by her position and by all that was transpiring around her, remained mutely seated, looking wonderingly at the man before whom everybody seemed to bow in submission.

"Whatever you desire, madam," he said, addressing her, "you have only to demand. There is no wish you can express which will not be instantly gratified, except one."

"Doubtless," she answered, wearily, "that one is the only wish which I would care to have gratified."

"Possibly so; for it is the desire to leave these apartments before my return, which cannot be complied with."

"As I thought," she said, drily; "but if I am permitted to see the Queen, I shall

be satisfied, and you will have kept faith for once."

"You shall see their Majesties as soon as my poor influence can prevail upon them to grant us an audience. Meanwhile I would commend you to rest, that you may appear to more advantage, when you present your suit."

"You are most considerate, sir," she said, inclining with satirical courtesy.

"I am your servant, madam, for the hour," he answered, bowing with an excess of politeness, and withdrew noiselessly as a cat, although he still wore his heavy riding boots and spurs.

Late as the hour was, Cochrane proceeded immediately to seek an audience with his royal master. He did not delay even to make any change in his dress—a matter in which he knew the King to be somewhat punctilious, and about which he was himself usually most particular.

Booted and spurred and travel-stained as he was, he made his way through the guards and the attendants to the door of the ante-room of the presence-chamber.

The gentleman-usher whom he addressed regarded his appearance with some amazement, when he desired to be instantly conducted to his Majesty.

"His Majesty has given orders that he is not to be disturbed to-night," said the usher, with a degree of uneasiness in thus opposing the entrance of the prime favourite.

"Say that it is I, Robert Cochrane, that would speak with him," was the haughty answer.

"But in that garb?" hesitated the usher.

"My business will excuse my garb. Do not waste time, sir, for the matter is of pressing import to his Majesty."

The usher bowed and quitted the ante-

room, whilst Cochrane, waiting his return, endured the curious scrutiny of the gentlemen attendants without the slightest appearance of discomposure.

The outer one of the two doors which admitted to the King's chamber presently re-opened, and the usher beckoned Cochrane to follow him.

Sir Robert, with a subdued smile of satisfaction, immediately obeyed.

The doorway displayed the thickness of the wall, and the two doors were covered with red velvet, so as to deaden all sounds from within. The recess between these doors was large enough to have permitted six men to stand in it close together.

The usher thrust open the inner door, drew aside the heavy velvet hangings, and admitted Sir Robert to the presence of his Majesty.

The door closed, the hangings dropped

into their place, and the usher returned to the ante-room, where he was surrounded by his companions, who were curious to learn what his suspicions might be as to the motives of this sudden appearance of the favourite, and his hasty demand for audience. But the usher, a gentleman of years and discretion, was unable to give them any clue to what seemed so singular.

The apartment into which Sir Robert had been admitted was large and square, and was situated in the north-west tower. It was the one usually occupied by his Majesty for the despatch of ordinary business, and for taking his pleasure in the evenings.

On various stands and side-tables were placed numerous articles of vertu, suggesting at once the propensities of the royal occupant. Chief amongst these were the four mazers, large drinking cups, or gob-

lets, called after their original possessor, King Robert the Bruce, each deep enough to have made a couple of stout men more than happy if they drank fairly. One of the goblets had a cover finely chased.

The next in degree of curiosity was a great cock made of silver; and besides this, there were many pieces of filagree work from Italy, notably three salfatis or salt cellars, upon which anciently much labour was bestowed, as they played so important a part in indicating the rank of the persons who sat at table, and as the salt itself was a symbol of amity to those who tasted it.

There were many plates of silver exquisitely designed, and which were carefully preserved by his Majesty, who rarely took them from the strong black chest in which he secured them with other treasures, except when he designed to be quite

private, admitting only his most trusted favourites to his presence.

Such had been his Majesty's intention this evening, and the four persons who were with him when Cochrane entered were those whose companionship was supposed to have the worst effect upon his character.

They were the four comrades of Cochrane, and one of them at least was almost his rival in the royal favour. That one was William Rogers, sometimes called Sir William, an Englishman, and a musician, whose talents had won for him a place in the household of his Majesty, which was only second, if not altogether equal, to that of Cochrane.

Rogers was a man of considerable parts in music, although he has left nothing by which we can judge how far his real qualities were worthy of a king's friend-

ship. He was contemptuously spoken of by the barons as "the fiddler," just as Sir Robert was designated "the mason." He was a man of quiet bearing and shapely form, and when out of his Majesty's sight, a somewhat unscrupulous gallant, as was reported.

First of the other three men was Leonard, a tall, powerful fellow, with swart, moody visage, and frizzled black hair and beard. He was the King's armourer, and was called "the smith." The next was Torphichen, a fencing and dancing master, who was short in stature, but who had grown so broad and fat that his terpsichorean efforts had become of the most grotesque kind, while his florid, good-natured countenance inspired little fear for his skill at fence. But despite his obesity he could still handle a rapier with any man about the court, and could keep his ground,

too, against the most agile if he had only a wall to support his back.

The last of the favourites was Hommel, a tailor by profession, who acted as a sort of general chamberlain to his Majesty. Upon him were cast innumerable epithets of scorn by the dissatisfied nobility; but he was a tall stout fellow, very unlike a tailor, and although he endured from the Lords what he knew it would be useless to resent, he soon taught their servants to respect him by the joint means of his cudgel and his purse.

These were the men on whose account King James III. had sacrificed the society of his peers, roused their rage and enmity; put himself on the unhappiest terms with his brothers, and for whose sake he risked the good will of his people, thereby hazarding even his hold on the throne.

Rogers had been singing a merry roun-

delay, when Cochrane had been announced. The song had been abruptly stopped; now, when the knight appeared in a costume so little fitted to the private chamber of the King, and so little in keeping with his usual care in these matters, all eyes were turned upon him in puzzled wonder. They were satisfied that he had some weighty reasons for this apparent breach of respect. And they were right.



CHAPTER IV.

HIS MAJESTY JAMES III.

"See what burning spears portended,
Couch'd by fire-eyed spectres glare,
Circling round you both, suspended
On the trembling threads of air!

* * * * *

"But o'er thy devoted valleys
Blacker spreads the angry sky;
Through the gloom pale lightning sallies,
Distant thunders groan and die."

Prophecy of Queen Emma.

COCHRANE made one pace into the room, then, uncovering, dropped upon his knee, bending his head low, and waiting for permission to speak.

The King was seated on a chair big enough to have accommodated two persons comfortably, and the cushions of which were covered with embroidery, wrought by the delicate fingers of Queen Margaret. He was half-reclining on the chair, with his legs crossed, whilst his fingers were playing with the massive gold chain which hung round his neck. He had turned his eyes on Cochrane with an expression of amusement and some curiosity.

His Majesty was a little above the average height, and his form was shapely but slim. So far from there being anything massive or commanding in his appearance, he was rather effeminate in frame and look at this period, when he had scarcely attained his thirtieth year.

He had long, black, and rather curly hair; large dark eyes, and long curving

nose. His brow was smooth, flat, and very slightly receding to the roots of the hair. His mouth and chin were small and delicate as a woman's, which, combined with a sort of weak smile that generally played upon his countenance, were indicative of the indecision of his character. It was rather a handsome face, and a kindly one, but sadly deficient in all those qualities which mark a man fitted to hold authority. Clear decisive thought and inflexibility of will were the faculties most needed in one who was entrusted with the reins of a Government in which there were so many elements of disturbance as that of Scotland, and these were the faculties of which his appearance and manner displayed least.

He was dressed in a pink velvet doublet, puffed and slashed with white satin between the shoulder and the elbow, and

tightening to the wrists. The latter were encircled with white ruffles which displayed to the best advantage his small woman's hands, with their long tapering fingers. His trunks were of the same colour as his doublet, and descended to his knees, covering the tops of his grey silk hose. His shoes were of a light brown colour, with gold buckles of star shape and diamond centre. His waist was girt with a gold-threaded belt, fastened by a gold buckle.

"Advance, man, advance," said the King, in an easy tone of familiarity, "and let us know where you have been loitering this week gone, and why you come to us now in as little order as if you had been riding with a witch a broomstick-race to the moon, and had not had time to dust your cloudy cobwebs off."

"So please your Majesty," answered

Cochrane, approaching slowly, "I have been riding far and fast——"

"By my faith, you look like it, for your appearance is that of one who has outridden his courtesy."

At this Leonard, the smith, and Torphichen, the fat master of fence, despite the presence, or possibly on account of it, grinned at the jocular rebuke, and with apparent difficulty suppressed their laughter.

Rogers smiled quietly; Hommel, the tailor, opened his mouth wide and suddenly shut it, as if he had been about to give vent to a loud guffaw and had checked himself in time.

The subject of these demonstrations was not at all pleased by them, but he affected not to observe anything unusual.

The King, however, was rather gratified by the success of his wit.

"I have been riding far," continued Cochrane; "and no eyes were ever blessed with the sight of a fairer witch than my companion."

"Save the mark!" exclaimed his Majesty, starting, and involuntarily making the sign of the cross; "do you mean to tell us that you have come here after being in such unholy society? Stand back, man; there's a smell of sulphur about you."

"The witch, sire, of whom I speak is only the lady who has become my wife."

"That makes it worse and worse, for if you have wived with a witch you'll be half a warlock by this time."

"She is no witch in the sense your Majesty means, but a simple lady, and the daughter of Janfarie of Johnstone——"

"Yes, yes; I mind, you left us for the purpose of getting wed. Why did you not say that before?"

"I had forgotten to remind you, sire," was the wily answer, "because my thoughts were bent on graver matters."

"Graver matters!—certes there are few graver matters than that of taking a wife. Let us know what you think of more gravity; it must be somewhat curious, or you are a sorry lover."

"Has not your Majesty received a despatch from me?"

"Despatch?—no!"

Sir Robert looked slightly disturbed.

"Has nothing been brought to your Majesty by the hand of one Nicol Janfarie?"

"Nothing that we have seen."

"I bade him ride post-haste, and some ill must have happened him or he would have been here by cock-crow this morning."

The King cast a helplessly inquiring look at his attendants.

"Your Majesty will remember," said Rogers, in a low, smooth voice, "there was a youth arrived at this place this morning, and delivered a packet to you whilst you were walking in the court."

His Majesty's face brightened.

"Thank you, Rogers; you are right, and the packet was placed in your hands that we might study its contents at leisure. Where is it now?"

"In the cabinet, sire."

"Bring it forth."

Cochrane furtively bit his nether lip, for this indifference of his Majesty to a despatch upon which he had placed so much dependence chagrined him.

Rogers proceeded to an exquisitely inlaid cabinet which stood at the farther end of the apartment, and opening it, drew forth the packet Nicol Janfarie had delivered according to his instructions. The seal was still unbroken.

As Rogers advanced to deliver the packet to the King he was intercepted by Cochrane, who coldly took it from him.

"With your leave, sire," he said, "I will myself break the seal."

He tore it open, and unfolding the paper presented it.

His Majesty lazily took the document, and as if the perusal were a matter of effort, he settled himself back upon his chair, slowly smoothed out the folds of the paper, and then with a sort of sigh began to read.

But he had only glanced at the first two or three lines when his air of lassitude suddenly gave place to one of nervous attention. He started from his lounging posture; his long fingers clutched the paper tightly, and his eyes kindled with excitement.

"What is this riddle?" he exclaimed, in a tone of petulant impatience when he had read to the end of the missive; "by my faith it was well our wisdom left the thing till you were here to expound it; for, although there is much to rouse our wrath, there is nothing to explain on whom it should be vented. Expound, then, Cochrane, expound, and briefly."

"These are the matters, sire, which have caused me to outride my courtesy," said Cochrane, bending his head and speaking in a low tone; "but my explanation of them must be heard by no other ears than your Majesty's in the first place."

"Do you hear, loons? Stand aside, and let our faithful servant have private speech with us."

"The matter is one which concerns you all, gentlemen," said Cochrane, suavely apologizing for his apparent distrust of

his comrades; "and you will be made acquainted with it speedily; but circumstances require that his Majesty should have the power of commanding its suppression altogether if it seems fit to him to do so."

Rogers and the others, making a low obeisance to their master, retired to an embrasure at the farther side of the room, and waited patiently until they should be summoned to share in the confidence which Cochrane was imparting to his Majesty. Whatever might be their secret sentiments, they displayed neither envy nor dissatisfaction to each other.

"Now," said the King, impatiently, "read me your riddle."

"It is a dark one, sire."

"Let us have light upon it, then."

"It will vex your Majesty's kind heart sorely; and before I commit myself to the

words which I know will sting you to the quick and perhaps rouse your wrath even against me, who am only true to my duty and to the deep gratitude I owe you in revealing the discovery I have made;—before I commit myself to this I must crave your pardon for whatever may offend you in my disclosures."

"Say on, man. You have my pardon for anything save for keeping me in suspense."

Cochrane bowed, and proceeded with a manner and tone of earnest solicitude,——

"I have formerly made your Majesty aware of certain secret councils held by various ingrate and disaffected barons and their satellites, tending to the disturbance of your most gracious reign."

"Ay, ay, we are sensible of that. But they are fools who rush upon their own destruction. Our people are faithful, and we can trust to them."

"The greater part of them are so, sire, and they could not be aught else under so considerate a monarch. But the people may be misled; they may be deceived by false reports, and they would be only too ready to follow any leader whose position might seem to give warrant for his truth."

"That's true," muttered the King, changing his position uneasily; "but who is there of position high enough to give such warrant to become their leader?"

"I dread to remind your Majesty of the matters which have been already brought to your knowledge, involving two persons whose positions place them only second to yourself in rank and in the esteem of the country."

At this allusion to his brothers the King's face darkened, but it seemed to be a mingled feeling of sorrow and fear which disturbed him rather than one of

anger. It was evident that in spite of the confidence which he assumed, and tried to impress upon his favourite, he was troubled by grave doubts of what might ensue upon the outbreak into definite language of the disaffected mutterings which were daily swelling around him.

"But they would not dare the penalty of such treason," he exclaimed, anxiously.

"Pardon, sire, but who can tell what desperate deeds—what mad enterprises and what wild efforts may be undertaken by men whose ambition and jealousy blind them to their own perils, their own duty, and to the worth of their truest friend."

As these dark suggestions were whispered in his ear, with so much apparant earnestness that the fidelity of the speaker could not be doubted or his object questioned, the King leaned back, pallid in his distress,

and helpless as a child against the terrors which were conjured up before him.

A very little decision and firmness at this moment might have spared him many of the sad hours which were rapidly approaching. But whilst he listened his thoughts only became confused, and rendered his mind incapable of grasping clearly the circumstances which appalled him; he had to depend upon the direction and advice of those who had been the chief instruments in raising the threatening storm, and whose self-interest prompted their counsels. They had to protect themselves, no matter what the result might be to the master who had sacrificed so much for them.

He fell into a moody reverie from which he roused himself abruptly.

"Yes, they are mad to dream of this treachery," he cried, clenching his hands as

if in a spasm of pain; and then feebly trying to shut out the dismal prospect presented to him; "but they have done nothing yet—that is, nothing positive, nothing of which we have proof that would ennable us to act with the sternness necessary to such ingratitude and disloyalty."

"That they have held secret councils, you have proof, sire; and that the conspiracy is ripening to rebellion I bring you further proof."

"In what—in what?"

"Your Majesty's person and authority have been contemned and defied, and arms have been drawn against certain of your servants who claimed protection in your name."

The King, still with his hands clenched and now with his lips quivering, rose excitedly to his feet.

"Denounce the traitors—by our Sacred

Mother they shall know the authority they have braved—aye, if they were our dearest kin."

"I knew that this would vex your Majesty, but I implore you do not let the goodness of your nature which tempts you into passion prevent you considering these things calmly, else your enemies will have the advantage of you."

The King sank on his chair apparently exhausted by his ebullition of temper.

"Proceed," he said, with an impatient gesture of his hand. "Let me know how this came about."

He shaded his eyes with his hand as if to conceal the effects of the emotion he had just undergone. Like all weak men, he was subject to sudden bursts of passion, which as suddenly collapsed, leaving him in a manner prostrated by the exhaustion of his fury.

"You will pardon me, sire, for mingling my own affairs with yours, since it is through them that this first blow has been struck at your authority."

"Go on."

"I obey. The Abbot Panther has returned to Scotland, and he has brought with him Gordon of Lamington. They are the bearers of a secret treaty between France and—I shall say—the conspirators."

"Well?—you have arrested them—you have them safe under guard, and you have got the treaty—where is it?"

"It was only yesterday that I learned what were their treasonable purposes. I would not arrest them until I was sure of laying my hands upon the despatch at the same time. As I could not be sure of that I left them free."

"Free," cried the King, "free with such dangerous weapons in their hands—free to

execute their fell mission, and mayhap to disturb the peace of the whole realm. You are mad, Cochrane, and you have lost the opportunity to do a service that would have rendered us your debtor for life."

"I trust when you have heard me, sire, that you will acknowledge I have served you best in acting as I have done."

"It will be strange if I do," muttered his Majesty, bitterly.

"You will judge when I tell you that both men are under the close watch of faithful servants of your Majesty; and I have contrived to make both men as eager to stand in your presence as I am to lay hold of them on your Majesty's behalf."

"You have brought them here, then?"

"No; but they are riding hither as fast as horses will carry them."

"For what reason, in the saints' name, are they so ready to thrust their heads into

the lion's jaws?" asked James, looking up with an expression of profound astonishment which seemed to have overwhelmed his anger and alarm.

"It happens in this way, sire. The conspirators have been for some time seeking any straw which might show in what direction the current of popular humour was flowing; and they have at last found it with the help of this youth, Gordon. There had been some love passages between Mistress Katherine Janfarie and he before he went abroad. He returned in time to cause my name to be maligned in the hearing of my betrothed wife. She was deceived by direct falsehoods, and before we had been an hour away from the altar on which she had sworn wifely fidelity to me, she fled with Lamington."

"Eh, what! carried your bride off? My faith, that was a bold stroke of gallantry;

but I scarcely see how it bears upon the conspiracy."

And his Majesty, who had a natural esteem for those rash deeds which ballad-makers delight to sing, although he lacked the courage to execute any of them, was almost disposed to view the escapade as an excellent jest, notwithstanding the present agitation of his mind.

But Cochrane went on to narrate the various circumstances which had occurred, cunningly interweaving his account of them with the threads of the conspiracy. He traced the source of all that had happened not to the real cause—the thwarted affection of the lovers—but to the desire to injure him as one of his Majesty's most faithful servants. He laid much stress upon the riot in Dumfries, and upon the refusal of the burgesses to lay down their arms or to retire peacefully when com-

manded to do so in the King's name; and attributed the whole action to the desire to sound the sentiments of the people in such an outbreak as had taken place.

The Abbot, too, was denounced as acting in opposition to the royal authority, and the proposal to submit the decision of the whole question to their Majesties was represented as having been forced upon the malcontents by the narrator's success in prevailing on the lady to accompany him to Linlithgow.

He cleverly threw a gloss of design over the unexpected events which had favoured his stratagem, and affirmed that his chief object had been to compel the Abbot and Lamington to appear at the palace without any suspicion that their share in the treasonable conspiracy of the Duke of Albany and the Earl of Mar had been detected.

When the narration was concluded James looked pale and weary. He had listened with increasing agitation as Cochrane proceeded; the amusement he had been at first disposed to take in Katherine's flight had disappeared, and in every word, in every action, treason seemed to be made apparent.

A man of resolute mind might have readily penetrated the false guise in which the favourite arrayed the simplest matters, but James failed to do so. His temperament being naturally nervous and imaginative, he was only too ready to magnify shadows into huge substances, even without the promptings of such a man as Cochrane. But with such men to hum suspicion in his ear, rumours became truths, and the unsupported charges made by his favourites against all who might threaten to endanger their position, became facts.

"But what are we to do?" he asked, helplessly, at last.

"Act promptly and firmly, sire, as becomes an offended monarch whose generosity and confidence have been most abused by those who should have been most faithful to him."

"Yes, yes, we will arrest this meddling Abbot, and the young fool Gordon, the instant they show themselves. You shall prepare the warrants forthwith."

"Pardon, sire," said Cochrane, dropping on his knee; "but you are striking only at the branches and leaving the root of the danger untouched."

"What would you have?" was the somewhat petulant ejaculation.

"I risk my head in speaking what all others fear to speak; but I risk it freely since it is for your Grace's weal."

"Speak," said James, watching him with a startled expression.

"Call your servants and friends together, tell them all that you know, and take my life if they do not answer you that, to insure your own safety from open rebellion or from the secret assassin, Albany and Mar must be arrested before the least sign is made that their guilt is known."

The King sank back on his couch, covering his face with his hands.

Cochrane felt that not only his fortune, but his life depended upon the result of the struggle which was passing in the mind of his master; and he hastened to supplement what he had already said, by a reference which he knew would influence the superstitious nature of the monarch.

"Remember, sire, the warning of the wise man who cast your nativity only a few days gone—remember, sire, that the astrologer warned you that in Scotland

a lion would be worried to death by his own whelps."

"It was so, it was so—the good man said it," said James, starting up excitedly; "and forewarned, forearmed. We shall take prompt measures. Call our friends together."

A council of the five favourites was held upon the instant.

One hour later Cochrane quitted the royal apartments, having received the promise of the King to compel Mistress Katherine's obedience to her lord, and having in his possession two warrants of arrest.

The warrants were for the king's brothers —Albany and Mar.

With these powerful opponents removed, Cochrane felt that he could defy all the efforts of Lamington to obtain justice.

CHAPTER V.

THE SECRET PASSAGE.

"Now, nought was heard beneath the skies,
(The sounds of busy life were still)
Save an unhappy lady's sighs
That issued from that lonely pile.

* * * * *

"Thus sore and sad the lady grieved
In Cumnor Hall, so lone and drear;
And many a heartfelt sigh she heaved,
And let fall many a bitter tear."

Cumnor Hall.

THE man Ross provided a repast for Katherine, and introduced a simple-looking girl, whom he called Mysie, to wait upon her.

Katherine was glad to have one of her

own sex near her. Humble as the girl might be, her presence seemed to the lady a species of protection in the midst of the utter loneliness which oppressed her, notwithstanding the neighbourhood of a crowd of people. The apartments were singularly quiet, and their heavy draperies cast dark shadows on the floor. At intervals she could hear the tramp of a sentinel, and the clang of his arms in the court below, or the soughing of the wind down the wide chimneys; but these were the only sounds she heard. The thickly-padded doors prevented her hearing any stir in the corridors, and made the interior of the palace appear grimly silent.

With the assistance of Mysie she arranged her dress, and having ate a little, she was refreshed.

Mysie was modest and attentive; she had clear, honest eyes; and Katherine was

inspired with the hope that she would learn from her what opportunities there might be of obtaining an audience with the Queen.

The girl wheeled a large chair in front of the fireplace, and the lady seated herself. She had been eyeing the apartment curiously for some time; and now she turned to Mysie, who was standing patiently behind her, waiting to render any service that might be needed.

"Come nearer, Mysie—that is your name?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Have you been long in the palace?"

"Only a few months, your ladyship. My uncle Ross, who brought me to you, procured my admission by the favour of Sir Robert Cochrane."

Katherine experienced a slight shock at that announcement, which disclosed that she was under the care of those who were

bound to her persecutor by the strongest of all ties—that of self-interest. She contrived to hide her feeling of distrust, and went on.

"Will it be very difficult, do you think, for me to see her Majesty the Queen?"

"Oh no," answered Mysie, with simple enthusiasm; "the Queen is a good, kind lady, and is always ready to see even the poorest of her people who may have a suit to plead. Have you never seen her, my lady?"

"No; but I desire very much to make an appeal to her Majesty at the earliest moment that I can obtain an audience."

"You will only have to make known your wish, for Sir Robert Cochrane can do anything."

"But I am not Cochrane."

"But you are his lady."

"His lady!" exclaimed Katherine with

difficulty retaining her seat. With forced calmness she asked, "Why do you think that?"

Mysie looked amazed.

"Because my uncle told me so, and because I supposed that nobody except Lady Cochrane would occupy these chambers when he was in the palace."

Katherine gazed slowly round the room, and then fixing her eyes upon the astounded maid:

"Are these his apartments?" she queried, whisperingly.

"Yes, my lady." (More and more amazed by the question.)

Katherine turned her face quickly to the fire, looking earnestly at the blazing and crackling logs. She saw now some of the reasons why he had so readily complied with her request to be conveyed to the palace. Having got her there, he had

cunningly contrived to place her in a position which would compromise her for ever—not only in the eyes of their Majesties to whom she was to make her appeal, but also in those of Lamington.

She drew a long breath, and her lips closed tightly as the spirit of resolution rose within her. She was determined to baulk his design at any risk, at any sacrifice to herself.

But she felt that she must not display this determination to the girl beside her. So she spoke quietly.

"Where does the chapel stand, Mysie?"

"You can see it from the window there to your right."

"And is there no way of reaching it except by the way we came here? I would like to attend matins, but I do not care to pass along the general corridors."

"There is a private passage, my lady,

which will lead you down to the hall of the Queen's confessional; from there you can pass to the chapel without anybody seeing you, because only the private attendants of their Majesties are permitted to go that way. But you would require to get permission."

"Thank you, Mysie. Does the private passage you spoke of communicate with these apartments?"

"Yes, my lady, by a door behind the tapestry there."

Katherine observed the direction in which the girl pointed without showing any unusual interest. She remained silent for a little while, busy calculating on the chances of her being able to open the door.

At length she bade the girl retire, telling her that she required no further attendance until the morning. Mysie asked if she

might not assist to disrobe her, and the aid being declined, she withdrew.

Katherine started to her feet and hastened to the door which had just closed upon the girl. There was a massive lock on the door, but the key was absent, and as there was no bolt, she had no means of securing herself against intrusion except by raising a barricade of furniture.

There was no time for that, and so she hastened to the place indicated by Mysie as the entrance to the secret passage. She had no definite idea as to what her course was to be; the only thing clear to her was that she must escape from these apartments. What she was to do after, there would be time enough to consider when she had overcome the first and chief difficulty of obtaining egress.

She drew aside the tapestry and readily discovered the small dark-coloured door of the secret passage.

Just as she made the discovery, the attendant Ross entered the apartment.

She, however, dropped the tapestry in time to prevent him detecting the nature of her occupation.

The man explained that he had knocked, and had fancied that permission to enter had been given to him. He only desired to know if her ladyship required anything more that night.

"Nothing, thank you; I only desire to be undisturbed."

The man bowed respectfully and departed.

She breathed freely again; and instantly resumed her task. She pressed against the door with all her strength; but it was fast, and she could not move it. There was no handle on the door; but there was a key-hole, which rather dismayed her, for it suggested that it was locked in the ordi-

nary way; and without the key it would be impossible for her to open it.

She had expected that, as was usual with doors of this kind, it would be fastened by a spring, the trick of which she had thought might be discovered by careful scrutiny, and the persevering test of every object in which the secret might be hidden.

She peered through the keyhole, and saw nothing save utter darkness. Then she determined to search, thinking that the appearance of the lock might be only intended to deceive any one who tried to penetrate the mystery of the door.

She searched. Half an hour passed during which her eyes and fingers worked unceasingly; not a nail or seam, not a spot of the door and its framework as large as a finger-point was left untouched.

She won success at last. Pressing her

hands against the lintel, she found that the whole side of it moved slightly inward. Another effort, and the cunningly-contrived secret yielded to her perseverance. The lintel moved stiffly, there was a sharp click as of a bolt moving in the lock, and the door opened.

She discovered the first few steps of a narrow, spiral staircase, which looked like the mouth of a dark pit.

Without a moment's hesitation she went back to the table, on which stood several wax tapers, and extinguished them all except one. Carrying the lighted taper in her hand, she began the descent of the staircase, having closed the door behind her. She did not mean to return to Cochrane's apartments, whether she found her way out of the secret passage or not.

The light flickered in the damp, close

atmosphere; and she was obliged to pick her way carefully, for the steps were steep, winding round and round a stone pillar with such rapid gyrations that one unaccustomed to the stairs would have grown giddy, and probably fallen in an attempt to proceed at a quick pace.

Several times a chill draught of wind threatened to extinguish her light. She thought that the bottom of the staircase would never be reached, the descent seemed so long and weary; but the satisfaction of having escaped from the wretched dilemma in which Cochrane had contrived to place her was more than sufficient to give her strength to pursue the advantage she had obtained.

At length she reached a narrow landing-place from which two passages diverged. She was slightly giddy, and without the least consciousness of direction.

She chose the passage to the left, but before she had proceeded more than a dozen paces the light was suddenly extinguished.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE ORATORY.

"Then out it spak' her, bonnie Jane,
The youngest o' the three:
'O lady, why look ye so sad?
Come, tell your grief to me.'

"'O wherefore should I tell my grief,
Since lax I cannot find?
I'm far frae a' my kin and friends,
And my love I left behind.'"

Bonnie Baby Livingstone.

THE darkness was intense, and for a few moments she stood bewildered, and uncertain whether to advance or retreat.

An instant's reflection, however, was

sufficient to decide her course. She placed the now useless taper on the ground and advanced, groping her way cautiously.

The progress was slow, and in her excited state it was painfully so. The distance seemed to be considerable, and Katherine fancied that she was traversing the whole length of the building.

At last she reached what seemed to be the end of the passage. But the wall was stone, and all her efforts failed to discover any outlet. She turned back, feeling along the wall, and about six yards from the extremity of the passage she found a door.

At the same moment her ears were suddenly greeted by the dull, muffled sound of voices speaking within. She restrained her breath, and listened with senses quickened to painful acuteness. Gradually the sounds became more dis-

tinct; they formed into words, and, with a shudder of alarm, she became aware that Cochrane was one of the speakers.

It was a private door of the King's apartment that she was standing at, and it was the conference of his Majesty and his favourites regarding the ripening conspiracies, in which she was thus accidentally made a participator.

Although the sentences were incomplete on account of the occasional indistinctness of the sounds, she heard enough to make her aware of the grave danger that threatened Lamington and the Abbot, and to enable her to understand that their friends, Albany and Mar, on whose protection they had been calculating, were to be themselves made prisoners.

She was as much frightened by the manner in which her discovery of the secret had been made, as by the nature of

the secret itself. She was as much appalled by her present position as by the observations affecting herself.

"She is a silly wench," Cochrane said, "and these knaves have deceived her regarding me so that she has learned almost to despise me."

"Have no fear," answered the King; "she will think better of it when she has learned our decision on the subject."

"Then I will take my leave, sire, and see that your commands are promptly executed."

At these words Katherine was roused from the sickening stupor which was overcoming her. The reflection that Sir Robert would proceed to his apartments and discover her absence reminded her that the danger she sought to escape was as near as ever.

She retraced her way along the passage;

but now she proceeded with steps quickened by terror. At the foot of the staircase she descried a gleam of light from above, and heard the footsteps of a man.

With no thought save that she was putting distance between her and the pursuer, she darted onward by the passage to the right of the stair.

She had proceeded about thirty paces when, glancing back without halting, she tripped on her dress, stumbled, and fell. In falling, her hands touched some woodwork, which seemed to yield to them. Springing up, she tried it, and found it was a door which, having been left unfastened, yielded to her touch.

She drew it open, and, hearing the footsteps behind her, darted out into a broad, dimly-lighted corridor.

She did not know which way to turn; but observing a door slightly ajar, she

rushed towards it and very unceremoniously entered an apartment which presented a spectacle that caused her to halt, panting, timid, and ashamed of the violence of her entry.

The apartment was small, but with a high oaken panelled roof, on which were painted various armorial bearings of the royal house, with their numerous quarterings. There was a pale, sad light in the place, and at one end stood a small altar, on which a dozen waxen tapers were burning before a crucifix. This at once indicated the character of the chamber: it was the Royal Oratory, or confessional.

When Katherine entered there were two ladies standing near the door, who regarded her with looks of astonishment. At the altar stood a venerable man in sacerdotal robes, and before him, kneeling on a black velvet cushion with gold tassels, was a

lady, so intent in her devotions, that she did not observe the entrance of the intruder.

In front of the lady was a stool covered with red velvet, and bearing the royal arms on its sides. On the stool was placed a cushion similar to that on which she knelt, and upon it lay an open missal. Her hands—white and small almost as those of a child—were clasped, and her eyes were fixed devoutly on the book.

She was of rather diminutive stature, but the bearing of the delicate form was full of dignity and grace. Her features were clearly defined, and of decisive expression, although cast in no massive mould. Her hair was black, and her brow high, square, and marked with certain very faint lines, suggestive of anxious thought. Her eyebrows were high and black; her eyes were of a

deep brown hue, bright, and penetrating; they were eyes capable of expressing the tenderest affection and the sternest wrath, as occasion might arise. Her nose was straight and rather long; her mouth small, and, with the square-cut chin, expressive of much firmness.

Her dress consisted of a brown bodice, ornamented with embroidery of the most intricate design. Beneath this was a dark blue velvet gown, trimmed with ermine. On her head she wore a coronal of jewels; and round her neck was a string of pearls, supporting a cross.

Katherine was not permitted time to observe all these details. The two ladies who stood near recovered from their surprise and advanced simultaneously, as if with the purpose of bidding her retire.

But before they had spoken a word the door was flung open again, and Sir Robert

Cochrane, with visage flushed and wrathful, appeared.

The priest, who from his position at the altar could survey all that transpired, hastily bent down and whispered something in the ear of the kneeling lady. Then he drew his hood over his face.

Katherine, with a half-stifled cry of alarm, flung herself at the feet of the lady who had now risen.

Cochrane, apparently blind with vexation, did not seem to observe the presence of any one save Katherine, and followed close after her.

"Help me, help me," cried Katherine. "Oh, madam, save me from that man!"

Cochrane was bending to grasp her arm and drag her from the place, when he was arrested by the voice of the lady whose devotions had been so rudely disturbed. Her tone was clear and authoritative.

"Hold, sir! and bethink you in what place you stand, and in whose presence."

Cochrane, with a smothered ejaculation, drew back, hastily uncovering.

"Pardon, your Majesty, pardon," he said, huskily, and with evident anxiety; "I would have spared your Grace this unseemly interruption had not this lady, ignorant of the respect due to your privacy, broken from me, and so caused this disturbance. I beseech your Majesty to attribute my present confusion to its proper cause—the shame and annoyance I feel in seeing my wife thus unbecomingly present herself to you."

"The Queen!" exclaimed Katherine, with a glow of surprise and joy, while she clutched the hem of her Majesty's robes, and looked up into her face imploringly. "Oh, grace—grace, your Majesty. I came hither to seek your protection from the

misery which this man has caused me, and from the malice with which he pursues me. Pity—pity and save me; in the name of the Sacred Mother, at whose shrine you have been worshipping, I crave your protection."

And she bowed her head, trying to stifle the sobs of anguish which were wrung from her by the contending emotions of terror, hope, and doubt.

"Your Grace will not heed this raving," said Cochrane, hastily, but resuming somewhat of that courteous demeanour which, in the first moments of his excitement, he had partly forgotten; "Lady Cochrane has been sorely tried of late by the ruthless assassination of her father under the hand of one for whom she had formerly entertained some liking. Other afflicting circumstances have strained her strength to its limit, and I fear her wits have

become affected, for she shrinks most from those who hold her nearest—her mother, brothers, and myself."

"Oh, heaven bear witness how false he speaks even whilst he stands at its altar," cried Katherine, vehemently, and raising her head; for her alarm lest the Queen should yield to his sophistries and resign her to his charge, imparted a courage and a quickness of speech which she could not have displayed in the royal presence but for her cruel necessity: "do not trust him; for our dear Lady's sake give me your protection — only for to-night, and if to-morrow I fail to prove myself worthy of it, spurn me from you, and let him work his spite upon me."

When her Majesty had risen, she had regarded the intruders with a degree of wonderment, then she had scrutinized the upturned face of the pleading woman, and

scanned the disturbed visage of Cochrane whilst he eagerly endeavoured to explain or contradict the statements of Katherine. Now, with calm dignity, she interrupted him as he was about to make some new averment to counteract whatever impression Katherine's last words might have produced.

"Peace, sir," said Queen Margaret; "and remember that this is neither the place nor time for the explanation of your affairs. This lady pleads for my protection in the name of the Most Holy, and I grant her prayer till we have time to investigate her cause."

"Heaven will bless your Majesty for this mercy," exclaimed Katherine, fervently.

"But your Grace misunderstands—she is my wife," said Cochrane, darkly; "and not even Majesty itself has the right to

step between those whom the Church has joined."

"To-morrow, sir, we will decide that."

"But the King has given me his authority to enforce her obedience to the vows which she would forswear in the present perverted state of her mind."

"I will be responsible to his Majesty for her safe keeping till the morning," was the calm response.

"Your Majesty cannot mean that you will listen to the idle tale of a weak-minded woman when you know that she is acting in opposition to her kindred, to her husband, and to the king's command."

"Enough, sir; all that we will hear at the proper occasion. You can retire."

"I obey your Majesty, but this is contrary to law and reason ——"

He was interrupted by the stern gaze which Margaret fixed upon him. Even

Cochrane, spoiled as he was by the influence he possessed over the King and by the consciousness of the power it gave him, dared not brave her displeasure too far; for Margaret possessed that strength of character which her husband lacked, and had her counsels not been rendered effectless by the plastic nature of the King in the hands of his favourites, the history of his reign might have been very different.

"How, sir," she said, her eyes brightening with scorn, "have you neither respect for my command nor for this place that you still parley when I bid you go?"

Cochrane dropped on his knee and almost touched the floor with his brow to show his humility.

"Pardon, your Grace, and if my tongue has moved in opposition to your will, it is because a distracted man believes in the

goodness of your heart and in the wisdom of your judgment."

She turned from him, motioning him away.

"A boon, your Majesty, a boon!" he cried, humbly, without rising.

"Name it."

"One instant's private speech with Lady Cochrane."

"No, no, most gracious madam, do not grant him what he asks," was the imploring cry of Katherine.

"Let him speak; he cannot harm you, and I would not give him cause to complain that he had been unfairly dealt with."

Her Majesty moved a few paces aside to where the priest was standing, keenly observant of all, but carefully keeping his features screened.

Cochrane grasped Katherine's arm, and drawing her towards him, whispered hotly in her ear:

"Beware of what you say. If your tongue wag too fast, or your frenzy betray you in your charges against me, your own life and *his* may be the forfeit. Do not be deceived by what seems to you a triumph, for a few days will show you that my will is potent even here."

She shuddered as she listened to the words which seemed to penetrate her ear with the sharp sting of a serpent's tongue.

He released her, and bowing low to the Queen, withdrew slowly, his bowed head concealing the dark passion which overspread his countenance.

As soon as she recovered from the shock his words had given her, Katherine crept to the feet of the Queen, and with tears of gratitude, kissed the hem of her garment.

"Rise, my poor lady," said Margaret, with womanly sympathy in her tone; "I have been made acquainted with your sad

story, and trust me, whatever may be done to aid you will be done."

She assisted her to rise, and Katherine was comforted by the kindliness of her touch. She was puzzled by the intelligence that her Majesty was already aware of the events which had brought her to Linlithgow. That, however, was soon explained, for the priest throwing aside his hood, she recognized the Abbot Panther.

"Have no fear, my child," said his lordship, taking her hand. "I arrived here only an hour gone, but happily in time to acquaint our gracious Queen with the violence which has been used towards you."

"I owe you much already; I am still more your debtor now," she said; and then, bending her head to hide the blush which suffused her face; "but Gordon—is he not with you?"

"You will see him to-morrow, doubtless," answered Panther, and hastily addressed the Queen, in order to avoid further interrogation on that subject. "Your Grace is satisfied now, I trust, of the necessity there was for the concealment of my arrival at the palace. While yonder man has the power to poison the King's mind against us, the lives of none of those who love his Majesty best are safe."

"I fear it is too true," said Margaret, with a troubled expression. "Heaven help and guide his Majesty safely through the evils which are springing around us so fast and thick."

"Amen to that, with all my soul," said the Abbot, earnestly; "but if the dangers are averted it will be by your hand."

"It is a weak one for so great a task," she said sadly, her eyes fixed meditatively on the floor.

"It is a strong one, since its cause is just; and there are thousands of true hearts to rise at its beck. Your Grace will conquer, for truth is always strongest."

"May it be as you predict. Meanwhile, act as you may deem best, and be sure I shall not doubt your fidelity."

"I will count upon your Majesty holding that faith unswervingly, no matter what strange things you may hear of me. Do not hesitate, madam, to credit me that in whatever guise I may appear, I am working for your weal and our King's."

"You have my promise."

"And that will give me strength for any difficulties I may have to encounter. Before you leave me, madam, let me commend to your gracious favour one whom you will find devoted to you and yours as faithfully as myself."

"Let me know him."

"It is Gordon of Lamington, for whose sake this lady has risked so much."

"A true gentleman, your Majesty," said Katherine, crimsoning at the boldness of her advocacy; "and a faithful subject, although one who has been sorely wronged."

"I need friends," said Margaret, looking kindly in her face; "and for your sake I will believe Lamington all that you represent him to be."

"You will find him worthy of your trust."

"I can believe it, since you will be my hostage for his loyalty. For the present I will be your guardian, and when the knight arrives we will crave his Majesty's attention to your affairs."

"I have no power to thank your Grace as I would wish, for so much kindness."

"The wish will satisfy me. Good night, my lord, and do not fail to give me early

tidings of any movement that may concern us."

"I shall not fail."

The Queen, followed by Katherine and the two ladies in waiting, proceeded by a private corridor, to her apartments.

The Abbot betook himself immediately to the chambers of the reverend father whose place he had been filling in the oratory, and having changed his garments, he went in quest of certain nobles with whom he was leagued in the attempt to overthrow the too powerful favourites of the King.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CONSPIRACY.

"He's called upon his merry men a',
To follow him to the glen:
And he's vowed he'd neither eat nor sleep
Till he got his love again."

Baby Livingstone.

IT was midnight when Lamington entered Linlithgow. He was accompanied by Muckle Will, who had been enabled to overtake him without difficulty, in consequence of the delay caused by the combat with Richard Janfarie. Trotting along by the side of Will's horse was Stark.

Gordon had procured a change of clothes —a rough, countryman's suit, which effectually disguised his real character. Along the road he had obtained tidings at various places of the party he pursued, and at Lanark he saw the Borderers, who had been left to rest there until the morning.

But he had failed to intercept Cochrane, and now, with horse dead beat, and himself fatigued and dejected, he entered the silent town.

When they reached the ancient well which marked the town cross—an object of much respect on account of its sculptural decorations—he was glad to perceive a few rays of light which gleamed through the chinks of the shutter of one of the upper rooms of the inn. Some of the gentlemen of the Court or their followers were doubtless keeping a late revel, although there were no sounds of mirth or clink of glasses

issuing from the place to confirm the surmise. On the contrary, the house was as quiet as if its inhabitants were locked in the deepest slumber. But whatever might be the meaning of these contradictory signs, the traveller concluded that some one must be stirring within, and bade his servant knock.

That duty Will performed with a heartiness which roused the echoes of the town; and as if wishing to add to the din, Stark bayed loudly.

In an instant the rays of light which had attracted Lamington's attention disappeared, and no answer was given to the summons.

After waiting for some time without any heed being paid to them, Will was directed to knock again. He obeyed with greater demonstration than before, and succeeded this time in bringing the host to the

window above the door. He demanded the meaning of the untimely disturbance.

"Are ye a' dead or fou?" answered Will, indignant that the taverner should have kept his master waiting so long when it was clear that he had not been to bed.

"Wha are ye?" was the cautious inquiry.

"A gentleman and his servant frae Galloway."

"Is there only twa?"

"Na, there's three and twa horses."

"Where is the other?"

"Speak up, Stark, and let the dour creature ken where ye are."

Stark leaped up at the door baying sonorously.

At this point some one drew the innkeeper from the window, and spoke to him in a whisper. The result of whatever was said was the closing of the window and the opening of the door immediately after.

The landlord conducted Lamington into the public room, where he placed a light for him, and offered to provide refreshment as soon as he had shown the gentleman's follower the way to the stable.

Gordon seated himself on a stiff-backed wooden chair beside the remains of a fire which was smouldering on the broad hearth of the wide chimney-place.

He had no pleasant thoughts to occupy him. The dimly lighted tavern-room, with its sanded floor, its bare wooden benches, low roof and smouldering fire, were to his depressed fancy suggestive of the poverty of hope and fortune to which he had sunk. The last red glow of the fire was fading under the white film which gathered over it; and that seemed like his own hopes. The white clouds of disappointment and defeat were enshrouding them, and they were slowly darkening into despair; just

as the white film of the wood-ashes were blackening in the coldness of extinction.

It seemed so strange that a few days should have made such a dismal alteration in the prospect of his affairs. He had returned to his native land with buoyant anticipations of a bright future, which Katherine was to have shared with him. He had rendered good service in the army of the French monarch, at whose court a path had been opened for him that would have led to the highest honours. But he had turned away from it, yearning for the home of his youth—for the lady whose love had been pledged to him, and yearning to perform the noble task of cleansing his father's name from the stain which rested on it, and to regain the lands which had been unjustly confiscated.

The Duke of Albany had pledged his word that he would intercede for him with

King James; the Abbot Panther had promised his assistance too, and with these powerful friends to support his cause, he had counted upon a speedy victory, which he desired as much for Katherine's sake as for his own. Perhaps he desired it more for her sake; certainly had there been no consideration for her, or for his father's memory, he would have been well content to have remained in France, where his merits and fidelity had been most honourably recognized.

But with the promises of Albany and Panther he hastened homeward, and the first tidings he received on touching Scottish land were those of Katherine's bridal.

From that point his hopes seemed doomed to disappointment; he had rescued her and lost her; he had learned that the aid upon which he had calculated could only be

rendered him when grave difficulties had been removed; and he had discovered that the royal brothers had been placed in such a position by the machinations of Cochrane, that their power was of no more avail than his own.

He did not yet know to what terrible extremity the chief favourite of the King had carried his power, pricked on by an insatiable ambition, but he knew enough to understand that before the King would do him justice, the real character of Cochrane must be revealed to him so clearly that there could be no shade of doubt in the proof.

So weary did he feel that he began to speculate whether or not it would be well for him to bid a final adieu to Scotland, and to carry Katherine with him to France, where he might make a home and name for her.

But the cowardice of the thought made his blood tingle with shame: the action of a brave man was to assert his right in the teeth of all danger and all injustice. He would not fail in that respect: let the consequences be what they might, he would be faithful to his father's cause.

Through all these musings there was one fear haunting him: how would Katherine receive him after she had been made aware of the combat in the Druid's Circle? And how could he ever hope to claim her hand, if Janfarie should die? He had done all that a man could do to avoid the strife; he had inflicted no wound that could have been spared; and the only serious hurt her brother had received had been caused by his fall into the pit from which he had rescued him.

To explain all that so as to satisfy her that she committed no sin in uniting her-

self to the man who was charged with complicity in her father's death, and who had been directly instrumental in her brother's fate, would be almost impossible.

He was roused from these dismal reflections by the touch of a hand on his arm, and looking up hastily he recognized the jovial visage of the Abbot, who was attired in the sober garb of a staid private gentleman.

"You here, too!" exclaimed Lamington; "then Cochrane has beaten us all, and Katherine is at his mercy."

"Not quite," responded his lordship, with one of his genial smiles. "The lady is safe under the charge of the Queen—benisons upon her for a noble lady, and a true woman—and our friend is baffled so far."

He briefly explained what had occurred, and Gordon was relieved.

"But why are you here?" he queried, somewhat puzzled that the prelate should have quitted the palace to seek the hospitality of an inn; "and why are you in that disguise?"

"I wear this habit that I may pass to and fro with as little observation as may be. It is a humour of mine to enjoy the immunities of a private person whenever I can. I am here to meet some friends," the Abbot modulated his voice, and bent close to his interrogator: "Douglas, Earl of Angus, Lord Gray, and others."

"You have held a council, then?"

The Abbot nodded.

"And your decision?"

"Banishment or death to the whole brood of knaves who are undermining the King's safety."

"But Cochrane must be left to me."

"Surely, if you think him worthy of

any better punishment than a few yards of hemp may provide."

"And when will you take action? for I am eager to begin the work."

"As soon as Albany and Mar arrive at the palace. To-morrow a trusty messenger will be despatched to bring them hither. When they appear, those of the guards who may be depended upon will seize all who are known to be favourable to Cochrane and his companions; and, to render treachery impossible, Douglas will have five hundred men within call, and ready to overturn the whole garrison if necessary."

Panther spoke in a quiet tone, in which there was a note of intense satisfaction. Lamington listened with growing excitement as the bold scheme was unfolded to him; but with his feeling of gratification at the prospect of the decisive blow which

was to strike his enemy helpless to the earth, there was mingled a doubt as to how far the safety of his Majesty might be involved in the conspiracy.

"You have already explained to me," he said, hesitatingly, "that this movement concerns only the false parasites of the throne, and that there is no breath of harm to fall upon the person of the King."

Panther's brows contracted slightly.

"I have. Do you doubt it?" he said coldly.

"To be honest with you, my lord, I have feared that our present action might lead to something more. I am with you thus far, but no farther. I hate his minions, but I am his Majesty's faithful servant."

"So are we all. Enough, man; you will not doubt again when you know that the Queen herself prays for our success."

"I am content."

"Amen; may you be so always. And now let me know what has delayed your journey hither?"

When Lamington had recounted the events of his meeting with Janfarie and of the loss of the tablet, Panther gave little heed to the possible consequences of the fray in his anxiety about the latter misfortune. He, however, expended no words in upbraiding his friend for permitting the mishap despite the caution he had received.

"Our friends must have timely warning of any danger that may threaten them should the roll fall into unfriendly hands. Luckily it was so written that it can prove nothing against them, save that some unknown hand has joined their names together."

"If that is all we need give ourselves little trouble about it."

"Ay, if that is all; but Cochrane might make much more of it. Since there is no help, we must prepare for the hazard, and our action against him must be the more prompt and decisive."

"Command me when you will, and as you will."

"Enough; should any one address you with signs of authority, ask what tower is falling."

"And then?"

"And then you will know him to be a friend, if he answer—*the curse of Scotland.*"

"I will remember. Good night."

"Good night, and benedicite."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STORM-CLOUD BURSTS.

"Ye Highlands and ye Lowlands,
O quhair hae ye been?
They hae slain the Earl of Murray,
And hae lain him on the green.

"Now wae be to thee, Huntly,
And quhairfore did you sae?
I bade you bring him wi' you,
But forbade you him to slay."

The Bonnie Earl of Murray.

FOR fourteen days Lamington remained at the Black Hound Inn of Linlithgow, undisturbed by any unfriendly event; but fretting more and more as the days advanced under his enforced idleness.

He had not yet been permitted to see Katherine; and the Abbot had not yet fulfilled his promise of presenting him to Queen Margaret. But he could not complain of the delay, knowing how sincerely Panther desired to further his interests, and that he would avail himself of the first opportunity of serving him.

He was the more readily content to bide his time, being assured that Cochrane had quitted the palace on the day after his arrival with Katherine, and that whatever might be the nature of his mission he had not yet returned.

Panther visited him almost every evening, always in his private garb, and always anxious to avoid observation. Gordon was aware that there were mysterious meetings held in the hostelry long after the curfew had been rung, and the honest burgesses had extinguished their lamps and retired

to the slumbers of the industrious, with heads little troubled by politics beyond the bitterness with which they resented the attempt to force the base Cochrane placks upon their acceptance, and their dissatisfaction at certain new imposts with which the royal favourite proposed to fill his master's treasury and his own.

The meetings of the disaffected barons were held at the hostelry in preference to the private residence of any one of them, because the gatherings in a place of public resort were less liable to suspicion, even if they were discovered.

Gordon was not at first admitted to the conclave of the conspirators; but after he had been presented to Archibald Douglas, Earl of Angus—a man of gigantic stature, and possessed of all the fierce courage of the race from which he sprang—and to Lord Gray—a man of policy and discrimination—he was invited to join them.

He hesitated: for, however willing he might be to serve the cause they had in view, he still doubted the propriety of leaguing himself for good or ill with men whose power and ambition might, when the first step was gained, induce them to proceed still farther. On one point he was resolved, that nothing should tempt him to raise his hand against the King; and despite Panther's assurance, he feared that the Duke of Albany, whose martial character and dauntless spirit fitted him so much better for the throne than his more delicate-natured brother, might in the glow of one triumph seek another and much bolder one—namely, the abdication of James in his favour.

His suspicion was not altogether without foundation, and afforded reason enough for his hesitation. But there suddenly rang a cry throughout the land which scattered

his doubts to the wind and made him one of the most resolute of the conspirators although it did not alter his purpose of serving the King whilst he assisted to overthrow the myrmidons whose deeds were covering the country and the throne with ignominy.

The cry which stirred to the depths the passions of the people, high and low alike, and united them by a common bond of enmity to the government, was that Albany and Mar had been arrested.

The Duke was imprisoned in the castle of Edinburgh, and the Earl at Craigmillar.

Sir Robert Cochrane was recognized as the chief instrument of this arrest, and the warrant on which they had been seized bore his Majesty's sign-manual. Only too well-founded fears were entertained for the lives of the royal brothers when it became

known that the crime they were charged with was that of having conspired against the person and authority of the monarch; and these fears seemed to obtain confirmation when it was discovered that Mar had been secretly removed to a house in the Canongate, and placed under the care of Cochrane and his minions.

A general state of confusion followed; the dire cloud of civil war was lowering over the land; the very atmosphere seemed loaded with discontent and the premonitions of a bloody strife. The confusion was nowhere more apparent than at the Court itself. The guards were doubled in and about the palace; a regiment of trusty soldiers was summoned from Stirling and quartered in the town to be ready for any emergency to co-operate with the royal guards; the King did not stir abroad, but took his exercise in the quadrangle, and

that only when the troops were under arms.

The Queen passed through the town several times, with no more than her ordinary attendants, as if to show her confidence in the people; but it was noticed that the good lady was unusually pale, and that despite her effort to seem content, an expression of sorrow was on her countenance. It was pitiable to see the anxiety with which she watched her son, Prince James, then only aged about eight years, and who, in happy ignorance of the brooding turmoil around him, was blithe and mischievous as a child should be.

Several nobles fled from the court at the first tidings of the catastrophe, and fearing that they might be implicated in it, either took immediate refuge in France, or in their own strongholds, gathered their retainers about them, and prepared for war.

Others of the barons remained doggedly in attendance—amongst them Angus—but there was gloom upon their brows; they wore stout hauberks of steel under their coats, they had various weapons secreted about their persons, so that whilst they appeared to wear only their swords—to which they were restricted in the presence of the King in time of peace—they were in reality armed to the teeth; and they kept their followers ready to spring to their rescue at the first bugle note of alarm.

This state of matters continued for several days, during which nothing decisive occurred. Albany and Mar were still prisoners, and couriers were constantly passing to and fro between Linlithgow and Edinburgh.

At length there came a day on which the elements of nature seemed to give voice to the terrors and wrath which were

repressed in the bosoms of the people. All day the sun was obscured by big black clouds, and lamps had to be lit for the discharge of the most ordinary duties indoors. The rain poured steadily down without pause; fierce shafts of lightning broke through the dense clouds, and darted in fiery lines toward the earth; thunder rolled unceasingly, shaking the tenements of the town—shaking the palace itself—to the foundations.

The storm maintained its fury far into the night; and in the midst of it a horseman, whose steed was reeking through the rain which dripped from its hide, and its mouth foaming, galloped from the direction of the capital up to the palace.

The rider, with his cloak and coat soaked and clinging close to his body, the plume of his hat draggled and broken, looked somewhat disreputable; and the excitement

which gleamed in his eyes, would have suggested that the wine cup had been the prompter of his mad ride through the storm, had his voice not been so steady and his words pronounced with such clear precision.

As if he had been expected, the gates flew open at his first summons; his horse was taken charge of by a groom who appeared to have been in waiting for that purpose, and he, without having spoken more than half a dozen words, strode to a small door which was placed near one of the buttresses, and so artfully contrived that it looked like a part of the wall. Its existence would not have been suspected by any save the initiated.

The man who approached it now was one who knew its secret; and whilst the dense darkness of the night concealed him from the chance gaze of any of the

sentinels, he opened the door and entered the palace.

The passage in which he found himself was like all of its kind, narrow and dark. But the traveller was well acquainted with its intricacies, and he passed along with a rapid step, ascended a spiral staircase, and at last stopped at what seemed to be a door.

After pausing a moment, apparently to discover what might be passing within, he gave a peculiar knock with the pommel of his poniard.

Presently a light gleamed upon his ghastly visage, with its thin blue lips quivering as if in terror; and as a panel slid back in its grooves, Torphichen, the little fat master of fence, stood staring at the mysterious visitor.

The latter faltered for an instant, as if doubtful whether to advance or retreat;

then, clenching his teeth, he crossed the threshold, and hastily closed the panel.

Torphichen drew back a pace, with a look of fright.

"Swords and daggers, Cochrane!" he gasped, "what makes you look so haggard? Have the rebel dogs broke loose—are we surrounded?"

Cochrane, with a forced smile, and his lips still quivering, removed his hat, shook the rain-drops from it, and thrust back his hair, evidently desiring to rectify something of the disorder of his appearance.

"Seem I so wild, then?" he said, and his voice was strangely husky, whilst his manner was nervous despite his affected calmness; "seem I so wild that nothing better than rapine and murder is suggested by my presence?"

"I said nothing of murder," was the fencing-master's retort; "but by the best

Toledo that was ever tempered there is that in your air which made me fancy that Angus himself and all his howling tribe were at your heels ready to wipe off with their blades the long score of grudge they owe us."

"Pshaw! am I the one to blanch or look strange if all the wolves of Scotland were griping at my throat?"

"In faith, at such a pass, I would not stake my finger on the complexion of the best of us. But what is the stir, then?"

"You will know in time enough. Is his Majesty alone?"

"No, Rogers is with him, and Innis, the armour-bearer, is fitting on a new shirt of mail that Leonard just finished before he went away with you and Hommel. Our Lady send that the mail be of good proof, for there will be need of its best service speedily, or I am out in my reckoning.

There has been thunder on every face since the news came."

The words "the news" were pronounced with a significance which plainly showed their application to the arrest of the royal brothers.

"The thunder will burst to-morrow," muttered Cochrane, gloomily. "Fetch Rogers and the other fellow in here, and leave me with our master for a while."

The chamber in which this colloquy had taken place was a small, square cupboard of a place, only large enough to have permitted six persons to be seated at a table, and was used chiefly as a sort of waiting-room for his favourites whenever his Majesty desired to be alone.

Cochrane advanced brusquely into the royal tiring-room, where James stood at the moment, with Innis buckling on the new coat of mail, which was constructed

of such finely-wrought links that it did not interfere with the least or most violent exertion of the body.

"It fits as neat as though it were made of silk," the King was saying; "and so Burniewind (the smith, Leonard) said it would. If it will only stand hard dunts as well as it fits the body we'll owe him something."

"May your Majesty never require to put it to the proof," said Rogers, softly.

"I can say amen to that, man, with a clear conscience," answered James, somewhat sadly; "but I doubt that's a prayer we cannot hope to have answered. Eh, what the deevil's yon?"

"Your servant, Cochrane, my liege," answered that person, approaching and kneeling.

The King started back as if alarmed by his wild appearance.

"By my faith, sir, you come as if the hour had already struck when the strength of our mail and heart were to be put to the proof," exclaimed his Majesty, with an air of mingled anxiety and displeasure.

"My hope is of another kind, sire. I trust that your servant brings you tidings that will delay the proof of your armour, although it may trouble your heart. I crave private speech with your Majesty."

The countenance of James became agitated as he surveyed the disordered guise in which Sir Robert, the most fastidious of all his courtiers, had a second time entered his presence, and on this occasion there was a gleam of excitement in the man's eyes, and a haggard expression on his face, which, with the tone of his voice, suggested that something of very unusual import had occurred.

The knowledge of the threatening cir-

cumstances which surrounded him, and into which he had been led as much by this man's counsel as by his own fears, or the occasion for them, combined with the observation of Cochrane's trembling lip, served to thrill the King with a foreboding of the calamity that had befallen his family.

He signified to his attendants that they were to retire. Innis offered to remove the hauberk, but the King impatiently bade him leave it alone, and to give him his mantle. A handsome purple cloak, lined with ermine, was thrown over his shoulders, and Torphichen, obedient to Cochrane's hint, led the way into the waiting-room.

Cochrane had not yet risen from his knee, and whether with real or simulated agitation, his form shivered.

"In the name of all the powers of

heaven," exclaimed his Majesty, eager to hear and yet dreading what was to come of all this singular conduct, "explain, man, what is it that moves you so?"

"Oh, my liege—my liege," cried Cochrane, with vehement sorrow, "I, who would lay down my life to spare you the pettiest pang, am doomed to be your torture."

The monarch's countenance expressed astonishment and increasing alarm.

"Do your work then, sir; since you are doomed to it you cannot escape it; but if your intent be kindly, spare me at least that portion of the torture which lies in suspense."

Cochrane seized the hem of his Majesty's cloak and bowed his head upon it with an air of abject and awed submission.

"I dare not look upon your Grace's countenance, lest its frown kill me," he said,

huskily; "for the tidings I bring will afflict you whilst they promise you increased safety."

"Let them be spoken, then."

"One of your enemies—one of the most dangerous of your Grace's foes, because one of those most highly placed, is dead."

The King's cheek became pallid.

"Dead!" he gasped; "who is dead?"

"My despatches acquainted you that he lay ill in the house in Canongate."

"Then it is John of Mar you speak of," cried James.

"The same, my liege, and he is dead."

The monarch snatched his cloak from the man's grasp, and recoiled from him as if there had been poison in his touch.

"Villain!" he cried, with a violence of passion of which few would have believed him capable; "blood-thirsty hound—you have murdered him!"

"Sire, sire, hear before you condemn me," exclaimed Cochrane, now seriously alarmed for his own safety, and speaking in sincere distress of mind; "for all that I have done I had your Majesty's warrant."

A loud peal of thunder shook the foundations of the palace, and there was a pause, during which the King stood as one appalled.

"My warrant," he said, rousing himself. "Dare you so far as claim me for your accomplice? I gave no warrant for murder. Heaven itself proclaims you liar. You have stained your hand with the same blood that flows in our veins, and God bear witness, but there is no torture man or fiend can invent that you shall not undergo. Ho, there, Rogers, Torphichen, summon the guard and carry this loathsome vampire to the blackest dungeon of our hold."

Rogers and the others, astounded by the

loud outcry of their master, appeared in haste, and stood still more astounded by the strange command they had received.

Cochrane rose slowly to his feet and stood with an air of dejection and of respectful submission, but also with the firmness of one who feels himself injured.

"Your Majesty can take my life," he said, in a low voice, which reached only the King's ears; "it has been yours always, and I am as ready to yield it to you in this fashion as in any other. But I said nought of murder. The letter of my warrant I have obeyed, no more. What has been done, I have done in your service; and till now I have believed that he whom I served would never spurn from him, without hearing a word of justification, one who has been true to him when all others have been false. But I accept my fate; and, sire, believe that there is no torture your

hangman can invent that will make me cease to pray, whilst I have breath, for your safety in the midst of the perils which are about to assail you."

The King, during this address, stood at first irresolute, and when it was finished he motioned to his attendants to withdraw again. Then, as another peal of thunder shook the building, he sank on a chair, shuddering, and covered his face with his hand.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FATE OF MAR.

"Fell Lindsay puts his harness on,
His steed doth ready stand;
And up the staircase he is gone,
With poniard in his hand.

"The sweat did on his forehead break,
He shook wi' guilty fear;
In air he heard a joyfu' shriek—
Red Cumin's ghaist was near."

The Murder of Caerlaveroe.

THE silence which prevailed in the royal apartments for several minutes after the retreat of those whom the King had so hastily summoned with the intention of placing the

bearer of the evil tidings under arrest, was rendered only the more observable by the wild din of the tempest which raged without. To the superstitious mind of James it seemed as if the evil spirits with which his imagination filled the air were rejoicing over the demoniac work that had been done, and were loudly claiming him for their victim.

Cochrane's features were hard set and inscrutable, his bearing was that of one who had been unjustly accused, and whose offended dignity would not permit him to offer an explanation unsolicited.

The monarch abruptly removed his hands from his face as if angry at his own weakness. He fixed a look of scornful loathing upon his favourite; but the expression gradually became tinged with uneasiness as he observed the emotionless visage of the man who confronted him.

But his indignation was still strong, and sustained him in his resolution to wreak a terrible retribution for his brother's fate.

"Are you dumbstricken, sir?" he said huskily. "If not, give me knowledge of the worst that you have done."

"I waited your Majesty's permission."

"You have it."

"Then the worst that I have done, my gracious liege, has been to obey your mandate faithfully——"

"By heaven this is too much," interrupted James, choking with passion that was not unmixed with dread of what might be the consequences of such an accusation as he understood Cochrane to be making; "a second time you charge me as your accomplice."

"If your Majesty will be pleased to hear me to the end you will understand that I dare not, and need not, even were I bold

enough to dare, attach the mildest breath of calumny to your gracious person."

"Your tidings and your manner have been much misunderstood, then."

"So please your Grace, they have been cruelly misapprehended. My couriers have daily brought you tidings of the course of events. At the very hour when I staked my life and earned a villainous reputation in your Majesty's service—at that hour arrangements had been all but completed to seize your royal person and to keep you under constraint, whilst Albany as Regent, with the aid of Mar, conducted the government until you should be compelled to abdicate or——"

He paused, gazing steadily in the King's face.

"How say you? Be sure you have proof of this," cried James, all his ire rapidly turning to another object, "the

Sacred Mother have thanks, but this has been a rarely treacherous matter timely checked. But why have you stopped?—go on, man, and be sure that you do not speak aught for which you may not be prepared with warrant."

"Unhappily, sire, there is too much truth in my averment. I halted in my speech because——"

"Well?—because what?"

"The words burn my tongue, but it is proper that you should hear them. Let me call to your mind again the dark legend of the man learned in the signs of the heavens. He told you, my liege, that a lion would be worried by its own whelps."

"What of that now?" wrathfully exclaimed the monarch, but his complexion blanched.

"Only this—that the Regency was to continue until you abdicated or—*died*."

"Died? Am I so infirm, then, that my days may be numbered and my crown put up to barter?"

"Not so infirm, sire, but you may reign till your son's hairs are grey, which in my heart I pray will be your fortune, for our country's sake; but too generous, my liege, to deal with your enemies until they stand openly confessed before you. When they do that, your opportunity will be gone and they will have power to make terms."

The face of the King darkened as he listened.

"Ay, ay," he muttered, "I dally too much with the spark, and give it time to grow into a fire, spreading destruction around me and mine."

"It is because you, my liege, are too just, and those who are near you too envious."

"But your action has left the traitors

leaderless—they will not dare advance now?"

"That cannot be answered safely; for since the chief offenders in this matter—although I credit them with too much of your own kind nature to think otherwise than that they have been inveigled into this dark course by older heads and baser minds—since they have been placed under control, night and day my steps have been dogged by men thirsting for my life. Even here, standing in your presence, I am not safe."

"Humph, we shall see to it," said James, casting a quick, uneasy glance round the apartment, and running his fingers nervously over his hauberk.

"But great as the danger is to me now, my liege, it will be magnified twentyfold when it becomes known that Mar is dead."

"Ay, we are back to that foul work," he muttered, gloomily.

"The same unworthy suspicion which has made your face so wroth with your servant will be taken up by the thousands who hate me because of my fidelity to you. They will hold to it that I have done this deed; no proof of innocence will satisfy them, and if you desert me I must perish."

"Before we promise you protection you must satisfy us that you are blameless," said the King, returning to his sterner mood.

"That shall be done speedily, my liege. You are aware that immediately after the arrest, his lordship of Mar became afflicted with sudden swounds. We sought no chirurgeon's aid because we feared treachery might be used to remove him from your Majesty's guardianship."

"Dolts that you were, had you not

means at your command to render treachery impossible?"

"Our responsibility made cowards of us all. But what skill or cunning we could bring to bear upon his malady we used. He still grew weak, and I, noting this, determined that to-morrow we should seek proper aid. Saints pardon my delay. To-night his lordship entered his bath. He spoke of much feebleness, but of no pain, as Hommel, who acted as his chamberlain, closed the door of the bath-room.. We had no thought of the dread danger in which his malady placed him, and we tarried for his summons for Hommel to attend him."

"What followed?"

"The summons never came. We did not count the lapse of time at first, for we were busy discussing what chirurgeon of skill might be with most security called to his lordship's assistance. By-and-by we

began to marvel that he spent so long a space in his bath. Still we waited his pleasure to call; but when another half-hour had turned on the dial, we knocked at the door. No voice answered us; and becoming alarmed lest some calamity had happened, we forced the door."

"And found?"

"And found his lordship dead. He had been taken with one of his swounds whilst in the bath, his head had sunk below the water, and he was suffocated where the least sound—the least cry for help would have brought friends to rescue him."

The monarch shuddered slightly, and he remained an instant steadily scrutinizing Cochrane's visage for the least sign that might betoken falsehood.

"Did you leave him there? Did you make no effort to restore him?"

"We were at first horror-stricken and

frightened for the consequences of the misfortune to ourselves. But a moment after I tried with all my strength and skill to win him back to life, whilst Leonard sought a chirurgeon. The man came, and his cunning availed no more than mine. Finding that my Lord Mar was beyond hope of recovery, I resolved at all hazards to myself to ride hither and inform you of his fate. That is all, my liege, and it is the simple verity."

"You swear that it is so?" said James, huskily.

"I swear it."

The King pressed his hand on his brow, closing his eyes as if the spectacle his imagination conjured up were too horrible for his endurance. It seemed as if he wished to believe the bearer of these sad tidings blameless of any part in forwarding this event, and yet his instinct persuaded

him that the facts had been narrated in a garbled fashion, concealing the real cause of the swound which had resulted in the death of Mar. But even at that moment, so effectively had his imagination been played upon, and his dread of the growing influence of his brothers had been so fostered and magnified, that he could not avoid the miserable thought that Mar's death removed at least one powerful foe from his path.

He was grieved by the event, horrified by its nature, and yet he could not shut his eyes to the advantage, poor as that might be, which he reaped from it.

Whilst he stood faltering, whether to accept the statement he had received as a faithful one, or to deliver Cochrane over to the guard, the door of the room was abruptly thrust open, and he was startled by the distant sound of a tumult of voices

more than by the apparition of a woman, who thus, without leave, interrupted his privacy.

It was Katherine who presented herself in this strange manner, with an expression of terror and anxiety on her countenance.

She hesitated at sight of Cochrane, and he regarded her with a look of amazed curiosity. Then she advanced boldly to the King, and displayed Queen Margaret's signet.

"This has been my pass to your Majesty's presence," she said eagerly; "and she who gave it me implores you to save yourself, for your life is beset. Angus and his followers have forced an entrance to the palace, bent upon avenging the murder of my lord of Mar."

The ominous announcement which was made in this abrupt fashion, whilst his Majesty's mind was still in great

perturbation about the very subject that had roused his fiery courtiers to action against him, had the effect of stupefying him for a moment. He stood staring at the fair messenger of the Queen in blank bewilderment.

Cochrane, however, after the first bound of alarm and surprise that the vengeance he dreaded should have been sprung so speedily, rushed out of the ante-room to inquire the meaning of the disturbance, which was rapidly becoming louder as it approached the royal apartments.

The sound struck upon the King's ears like a dismal note of warning, and was heard above the wild tumult of the storm that was still raging. All the weakness and indecision of his character beset him at this moment. His vanity, and his keen sense of what was due to his authority, his consciousness of the degrading coward-

ice which his flight would display, prompted him to hold his ground as became one in his high place, and to awe his rebellious barons into submission by the calm firmness and resolution of Majesty.

He knew that he should stand before them as one raised above the petty fear of personal safety; but he also knew that his resolution would fail him when the troop of wrathful nobles stood in his presence demanding instant vengeance for the crime they believed had been committed by his favourite, and ready to take it if it were refused. The thought of his own helplessness to control the fiery spirits which he was aware would be opposed to him, and the thought of the shame which any display of weakness must bring upon him, counselled flight as the readiest means of escaping the dilemma in which he was placed.

The desire to maintain the dignity of the crown was as strong as his anxiety to avoid the exposure of its wearer's weakness, and between the two sentiments he remained pitifully inactive and irresolute.

Katherine could not guess the conflict of thought and emotion which was afflicting him, and she was distressed by the fancy that he discredited her tidings, or that she had failed to make him comprehend his danger.

"Your Majesty has not understood me," she said, with respectful anxiety—indeed, she seemed as anxious about his safety as the most devoted adherent could have been —"or you doubt my tidings; but here is the Queen's signet. Your own ears will satisfy you of the approach of the conspirators; and I, unhappily, have too sure a knowledge of their intent. In the name of my generous protectress and mistress,

I implore your Grace to seek safety in some place of hiding."

"Yes, yes, I understand," muttered the King, bewilderedly; "but who are the men —the traitors? By our royal hand they shall pay the penalty."

"For your life do not dally with the few minutes which are still left to your Grace. What matter who or what the men are? All that you can learn when the present peril is over."

"We shall call the guard."

"It is too late. Those who are faithful to their trust have been overpowered by this time. Oh, my liege, my liege, why stay here when you are but one man against so many?"

"Because I am their King."

He pronounced the words with a dignity and calmness inspired by the sense of his high office. Had he been gifted with the

strength of character to sustain that bearing it is probable that even Angus and his followers would have been as much impressed by it as Katherine was.

She was silenced, although still apprehensive of the consequences of what appeared to her the very rashness of kingly valour.

Cochrane rushed back to the chamber, closing and barring the doors behind him.

"It is too true, my liege," he cried, breathlessly; "you are trepanned—the knaves have overcome the guard and are close upon us. Fly, your Grace, fly, and I will linger behind to give you what time the sacrifice of my life may win for you; or to gather what assistance may be found to rescue us all from the bloodhounds who assail us."

All the dignity which had been displayed by the King a moment before

was changed into a manner of nervous agitation. He dropped his mantle from his shoulders, exposing his shirt of mail, but he seemed incapable of moving without direction. He eagerly sought for some weapon of defence, and not having a sword, he clutched the hilt of his poniard spasmodically.

At this moment Rogers and the others, who had been disturbed by the various unusual sounds they had heard, ventured forth from their place of retirement.

"Away you, Rogers and Torphichen," cried Cochrane, as soon as he observed them; "there may yet be time for you to quit the palace; hasten to the town, rouse the soldiers who are quartered there, and bring them to the help of our master. Away! Be silent and be speedy on your lives."

Rogers and the master of fence had

heard enough to comprehend something of the position of affairs, and without a word they wheeled about to seek egress by the same passage which had admitted Cochrane to the royal apartments.

"Hark you, Innis," continued Sir Robert, rapidly, addressing the armour-bearer; "remain you here, there is no danger to you, for those who are coming hither seek higher game. If they find entrance, detain them while you can, and when they force you to speak bid them search yonder chamber."

The latter words were spoken under his breath, so that only Innis heard them distinctly. The apartment he indicated was the sleeping-room of his Majesty.

The armour-bearer, with a bend of the head, signified his readiness to obey.

Cochrane picked up the King's mantle and proceeded to the room to which he had just referred.

"This way, sire, this way. We shall baffle them yet, despite their cunning."

James followed him with hesitating steps, bitterly sensitive to the humiliation of his position, and yet too feeble of will to remain when the eager voice of Cochrane was calling upon him to fly.

Katherine, desirous of seeing that her mission was completed, hastened after them. As soon as she had crossed the threshold the door was closed by Cochrane and secured.



CHAPTER X.

THE ATTACK ON THE KING.

"And they cast kevils them amang;
And kevils them between;
And they cast kevils them amang
Wha suld gae kill the king.

"O, some said yea, and some said nay,
Their words did not agree;
Till up and got him, Fause Foodrage,
And swore it suld be he."

Fause Foodrage.

FOR several minutes before the prime cause of all this disturbance had succeeded in leading his Majesty away, there had been loud knocking heard at the outer door of the suite

of apartments. So loud and furious waxed the demand for admission that little more strength seemed to be requisite to beat the door down.

From that act of violence, however, they were restrained by the venerable Lord Gray, who was most anxious that the heat of the moment should not betray his companions into any excess of violence against the King.

"Remember, my lords and friends," he said, "we come to demand justice from his Majesty, and not to insult his authority or alarm his mind, by rushing at him like a herd of wild Highland bulls, ready to gore him to death before he has had time to hear us or to grant our demand."

"I tell you we must force our demand," said Angus, hotly. "James is too woman-hearted to yield up his favourites, even when he knows their guilt. They will lie

to him, and they will persuade him to cheat us if he can. But by the blood of the Douglas there shall be little rest for him until the murder that has been done is requited, and Albany stands free amongst us."

"You waste time, gentlemen," said the Abbot Panther, approaching from the corridor as Angus concluded; "these doors are fast, and unless you mean to force them you may stand there till doomsday."

"Force them, then," ejaculated Angus.

"Nay, that would be an offence unpardonable against the King's person. Follow me, and I will find an entry for you that will save time and trouble."

The first to move after the prelate was Lamington, who had remained amidst the group of nobles silent, but watchful for the moment which might bring him into contact with Cochrane.

Angus and Lord Gray, with all the others, save half a dozen who were left to guard the door, followed. They were speedily conducted by the private passage —the same by which Rogers and Torphichen had just escaped—into the royal chambers.

There they found only Innis, the armour-bearer, who was immediately seized and roughly interrogated as to the whereabouts of his master. For some time, under the pretence of alarm, and the effects of the shaking he had received, he avoided answering.

But at length, when he was threatened with the point of a sword, he directed the conspirators to the door of the bedroom, according to his instructions.

The door was instantly assailed, and, on finding it fast like the others, several minutes were occupied in excitedly dis-

cussing whether or not they should break it down. In the mean time, the communication with the ante-room had been opened by one of the party—Captain Douglas, and those who had been left on guard crowded into the apartment in which the chief members of the company were now assembled.

"It is for his Majesty's sake as much as for aught else," said Angus, darkly; "he is in the power of his minions, and heaven knows how they may deal with him in the terror that he may deliver them into our hands. Break down the door. I say it in the King's name."

"In the King's name it is opened to you," said a woman's voice, as the door was suddenly flung back.

"Katherine!" exclaimed Gordon under his breath, and drawing back a pace, astounded by her unexpected apparition at such a moment and in such a place.

There was a brief pause of amazement, and then some of the younger gallants laughed, whilst the elders frowned.

Katherine, however, was too intensely absorbed in her desire to gain time for the King's retreat to observe the laugh or frown, or to have comprehended the miserable suspicion they indicated, even if she had noted them.

But Lamington heard and saw, and his blood pringled with the shame of it, so that for the instant he was deprived of speech.

"Who is the wench?" said one.

"A fair one, i' faith," answered his neighbour, "whoever she be."

"By my soul, his Majesty's taste is perfect in the works of art," muttered another.

"The door is open, gentlemen," said Katherine with dignity; "you have found the only key which could undo the lock—

your sovereign's name. Enter if it be your pleasure, for I will not believe that it is a regicide who demands admission with such a password."

"Where is the King, wench?" said Angus, sternly. "We were acquainted that he entered this room."

"He was here," she responded evasively, wishing to detain them as long as might be by an appearance of frankness which should disclose nothing.

"Answer straight, minion," thundered the irate earl, "else we may take means to compel your tongue to utter truth for once."

Katherine's cheeks became scarlet as the fact of the equivocal position in which she stood was thus rudely manifested to her. Before she had time to answer, Gordon sprang to her side. She had not had time to observe him in the crowd, but now with

an exclamation of joyful relief, she clung to his arm.

"You are mistaken, my lord, in the person you address," he said, haughtily; "how she comes to be here I cannot answer, but Katherine Janfarie is a lady of unstained honour, and he who gainsays me does so at the peril of his life."

Angus scowled; Lord Gray looked grave, and the others grinned.

"To that and more, in this lady's favour, I will pledge myself," said the Abbot, forcing his way to the side of his friends; "and I must pray you all to treat her with the respect due to one whom ill-fortune has placed in perilous ways."

"Your friends discover themselves under droll guises, my Lord Abbot," retorted Angus, suspicious that there was some treachery hidden behind this singular interruption to their course; "but if they

be worthy of the warrant you have given for them, the lady will not hesitate to acquaint us where we may find the King."

"If she has knowledge of it she will not hesitate, I stake my word," rejoined Panther, suavely, "when she learns that no harm is intended toward his Grace—whom Heaven keep in safety—and that it is the knave Cochrane whom we seek. Answer his lordship's question, Mistress Katherine, if you can."

She hesitated, and then spoke with proud coldness.

"I accept your pledge, my Lord Abbot, that this goodly company who have broken upon his Majesty's privacy mean him no harm."

"Our honour is pledged to that—is it not, gentlemen?"

"Most faithfully," said Lord Gray, and several echoed his words.

But Angus remained silent, too haughty to give a pledge which he deemed none should have required from him, notwithstanding the threatening attitude he occupied at the moment.

"You seek Cochrane," she exclaimed, remembering with what eagerness he had hurried the King away; "he has given his Majesty reason to believe that you were about to attack his royal person."

"And so has obtained protection for himself whilst he makes us seem blackest villains by hurrying the King away from us," added Lamington.

"As I guessed," muttered Angus, "the more need to find his Majesty at once. Speak, mistress; whither fled he?"

"He went hence by a private passage, and Cochrane with him," she answered; "but I have no knowledge of their hiding-place."

"Follow me, some of you," cried the earl, "to the chambers of the Queen—spread the rest of you throughout the palace, and leave no corner that would hide a toad unsearched for the assassin Cochrane."

The command was acted upon, the instant it was uttered. Half a dozen accompanied Angus, and amongst them Panther, that he might be near his royal mistress in the emergency, and that he might exercise what restraint he could upon the heated passions of his companions. The others seized the various lights which illuminated the King's apartments, and directed themselves to the search for the general foe.

Cochrane had need of all his courage and cunning this night, for those who were on his track had smarted under the slights his ambition and vanity had in-

flicted; many of them were kin to nobles and esquires who had been banished the court by his influence. They were men, too, of resolution, and conscious that their failure in this open outbreak against the favourites of James would result in their own compulsory retirement for a while, if in nothing worse.

Lamington alone remained with Katherine. A solitary taper shed a feeble light athwart the chambers of royalty which had been so recently ablaze and resonant with voices. Now they were deserted and filled with a ghostly silence, all the more remarkable from the bustle which had prevailed a little while previously.

Katherine watched the last of the conspirators disappear, and then she turned eagerly to Gordon.

"Lamington—Lamington," she cried, "do *you* credit them—are *you* satisfied

that they mean the King no harm—and why are you leagued with these men?"

"Because I love you, and because I hate Cochrane. That is why I have leagued myself with those whom he has wronged, and who thirst like me for his destruction."

"But do they seek it wisely in thus breaking through all law and exposing themselves—exposing you, Lamington, to the suspicion of the foulest treason?"

"There is no time for explanation, Katherine," he said, with a strange tone of sadness in his voice, arising from the many conflicting emotions which her presence inspired, and which their singular meeting this night had served to heighten; "I am with them for reasons which have satisfied me that theirs is the only course whereby justice may be wrought."

"And if they fail?"

"If they fail I perish utterly, for Death

will be the smallest penalty that our victors will requite us with. Angus and the rest have staked much upon this venture, but I stake more than all of them, for my hopes of winning you rest on the hazard."

"Then pause now; it is not too late."

"I dare not pause without being counted doubly false; for I can only prove the worth of the motive that has tempted me so far by pushing straight forward to the end."

"You will destroy all—the good Queen Margaret is our friend. She has given me her protection; she has made me one of her own closest attendants, and she has pledged herself to set you right in the estimation of the King—she has pledged herself that all you most desire shall be granted in spite of twenty Cochranes, if we will only have patience for a little while. She has given her gracious promise for all

this, and the Queen has never failed her word."

"I do not doubt it, and from my soul I am grateful to her; but it is too late to turn."

"Can nothing stay you—not even me?"

"Nothing can stay me, when to stay is to lose you. Cease your persuasions, Katherine, and help me to the end we both desire. We have already wasted time, and I am a laggard when I should be most active. As you are the cause of my sloth, be you likewise the means of proving my industry."

"In what can I aid you?"

"Show me which way has Cochrane fled. That is how you can aid me, and remember upon my finding him to-night depends our future."

She did not answer.

"You hesitate, and with me, when you

have learned how much depends upon the issue of this night's work!" he ejaculated, drawing back from her in wonder.

"If I have hesitated, Lamington, it has been for your sake—the soldiers have been summoned from the town; the guard will be released, and your escape will be impossible."

"Ha!—the soldiers already called in from the town—the more need for haste. Show me the way, if you are as wishful for our speedy union as I would fain believe you to be."

"*If* I am. Oh, Lamington!" she exclaimed, reproachfully.

"Prove it, then, and let Cochrane be swept for ever from our path."

"As you will, and the Sacred Mother help us both."

She took the remaining taper from its stand, and approached an ebony cabinet

which stood near the bedstead. She drew open one of the panels, and displayed a recess filled with various articles of curiosity. These she thrust aside.

"I do not think his Majesty would have moved from his place had it not been for Cochrane," she explained, as she proceeded; "he drew his Grace away and would not permit him to encounter the nobles, as he wished to do, even when I delivered to him the Queen's message begging him to fly—for she had been cruelly alarmed by what little she was enabled to learn from one of her attendants."

"Ay, Cochrane no doubt feared to let him act as his Majesty's own good sense dictated, and as a monarch should have acted."

"He almost dragged his Grace away, for he seemed to become too much confused to know what he was doing," Katherine

continued; "it seemed as if Cochrane were the master rather than the servant, and in my anxiety at the moment I obeyed him as though I did not recognize in him my bitterest foe. He bade me replace these things as you see them now, and whilst he was moving them, as we are doing, I watched him closely, and so discovered the trick of this passage."

As she spoke, a portion of the back of the cabinet yielded to her touch, and sliding to one side, disclosed the stone wall of the chamber. Again, obedient to a cunningly-contrived spring, a part of the masonry revolved noiselessly on a hinge, revealing an opening only large enough to permit one person to pass at a time. Gordon went first, and Katharine reclosed the various traps which concealed the outlet.

Then she took the lead, holding the taper high to show the path.

He wished to go first, but she was obstinate. She did not explain her dread, lest from some unknown recess he might be stricken down without the possibility of raising his hand in self-defence.

Whilst she preceded him, holding the light, and with its aid scanning every dark, suspicious nook, there was at least the probability that she would be able to give him warning before he could be assaulted. So she was resolute, and no entreaty of his could move her from the determination to be his guide.

She suddenly slackened her pace, and listened eagerly for any sound that might indicate the neighbourhood of others than themselves.

"Do you hear aught or see aught, that you linger?" he said, lowering his voice instinctively.

"No," she rejoined, in the same whis-

pering tone; "but the last words I heard Cochrane utter were that the vaults would be the safest place. I fear that we may pass the entrance to the stair that leads to them."

"Think you his Majesty would go with him?"

"I think he would proceed at once to the Queen's apartments, where he would be most safely concealed. Ah! here is the stair."

They descended a steep staircase and reached a lower passage, the walls of which were so damp, and the atmosphere so close, that no doubt was left that this was the region of the vaults.

They had only advanced a few paces cautiously when Lamington suddenly wheeled about at the light sound of a footstep behind them, coming from the direction on which they had turned their backs.

A man darted up the staircase, and instantly disappeared in the darkness.

Gordon would have followed, but his guide restrained him.

"It was his Majesty; I saw his mantle," she said.

"Then Cochrane is left behind. Now, St. Andrew, give strength to my arm, for no holier cause was ever served than that of destroying so foul a knave. Give me the light."

As he snatched it from her hand she had no option but to follow him with what speed she could. He rushed towards the place from which the man who had just ascended the staircase appeared to have come.

A voice called hoarsely, "Are they there?"

Guided by the sound, Lamington burst into a low, damp, noisome-smelling vault.

He heard an exclamation of terror, but at first could see nothing.

Presently his eyes became accustomed to the place, and he descried a man crouching in the furthest corner.

"Draw, villain, and save yourself, if you may," shouted Lamington, raising his sword, "or die defenceless, as the noble Earl of Mar fell under your murderous hands."

The sword was drawn back to thrust, when, with a wild scream of horror, Katherine arrested his arm.

"IT IS THE KING!" she cried.

CHAPTER XI.

WHICH IS THE TRAITOR?

"'May I find grace, my sovereign liege,
Grace for my loyal men and me?
For my name it is Johnnie Armstrong,
And subject of yours, my liege,' said he.

"'Away, away, thou traitor strang!
Out o' my sicht soon may'st thou be;
I grantit never a traitor's life,
And now I'll not begin with thee.'"

Johnnie Armstrong.

GORDON'S arm was paralyzed. His heart seemed to bound in his throat, choking him; his eyes became dazed, and a thousand lights appeared to be glancing before them,

whilst he could see nothing. He remained transfixed in his position—his sword raised, ready to thrust, and the taper held above his head.

When the King had asked the question which had disclosed his hiding-place, he had been under the impression that the footsteps he heard were those of Cochrane, who had just left him, returning with the news that the conspirators had discovered his retreat, and he had spoken in his eagerness to learn the worst.

It had been his wish to take refuge in the Queen's apartments, but Cochrane, aware of the small esteem in which her Majesty held him, feared that to pacify Angus and his companions, and to insure the safety of the King, she would not hesitate to deliver him into the hands of his enemies as soon as she was informed that he was the cause and object of the out-

break. So, he had persuaded his master to fly to the vaults, and had left him there whilst at no little risk he proceeded to seek assistance.

There was small generosity in his apparent devotion, however. He had simply chosen the least of two dangers. Safe as he might have been in this place of hiding, he knew that the safety would only continue for a time, and that probably in a very brief space his foes would fall upon him. Therefore he preferred to brave the more immediate hazard for the chance of finding help, and by another bold stroke defeating his pursuers. Then he might put what interpretation he pleased on the conduct of the barons, and his own position would be more secure than ever. To fall a prisoner into their hands in this hole, like a fox run to earth, would be irremediable ruin, even if his life were not taken on the spot.

The King discovered the blunder he had made the instant Lamington had answered his inquiry by appearing with the light; and fancying that a troop of regicides were behind him, he had crouched back in the farthest corner of the cell.

Everything seemed to confirm his suspicion of the man's purpose, and the short instant which intervened between the discovery and Katherine's recognition, was to the unfortunate monarch a long period of acutest agony.

Now, observing that the impending blow was arrested, and that his assailant made no movement to effect the threat he had just uttered, James rose slowly from his undignified posture, but he was obliged to lean heavily against the wall for support. He was sick with terror, and with the sudden revulsion of emotion which he experienced in his confused sense that by

some miraculous means he had been saved from the wretched fate which a second ago had been imminent.

Katherine could not utter anything more than that exclamation which rung in her lover's ears with a sound of inexpressible horror; but the horror was mingled with thankfulness as he slowly began to realize the position, and to perceive from what a crime he had been opportunely rescued.

Katherine was the first to recover from the stupor which affected them all. She threw herself on her knees before the monarch, thus placing herself between him and Gordon.

"Your Majesty will pardon the blind haste of one who mistook you for him who is your Grace's worst foe. Oh, heaven is kind, my liege, and has spared you whilst it has saved one who loves you from a deed that would have made him accursed in his

own eyes and in the eyes of the world for ever. Speak, speak, your Majesty. You will pardon his haste, which the saints above know was intended for your service."

James motioned to her feebly with his hand; but whether in token that he granted her prayer, or merely that he desired her to be silent, it was impossible to tell.

Lamington was roused by the sound of her voice, and he dropped on his knee.

The instant he moved the King started, and watched him nervously.

Lamington bared his head, seized his sword by the blade, and extended the hilt towards James, who shrank from it, whilst at the same time he seemed to remember the humiliating character in which such a movement presented him, and he made an effort to recover himself.

"Your Majesty can yourself judge how

miserably blind I have been," said Gordon, huskily. "I am your true servant, and will prove it with my life."

"Yes, yes—and you were like to prove it with mine enow," muttered the King, struggling to speak with some degree of dignity and calmness, but glancing anxiously toward the entrance in the hope of seeing Cochrane arrive with the guard to assure him of safety.

"The circumstances are not altered, sire, since I entered this place. Your gracious person is as much at my mercy now as then. You cannot, sire, doubt my fidelity, when I offer you my sword, and, if it please you, I am ready to pay the penalty of my blunder and place myself at your mercy."

"He is innocent, sire—innocent of any thought of treachery to you," cried Katherine; "and your Grace is too good,

too generous to blame him for the accident which has made him appear in such threatening fashion before you. The guilt is mine, sire, if any guilt there be in this, for it was I who led him hither; it was I who made him believe that he would find the enemy he sought. Grace, grace, my liege, for both, or let me alone bear your wrath."

James snatched the sword from Gordon's hand, but he showed no intention of using it for the purpose for which it had been presented to him. Resting the point on the ground, he leaned on the hilt whilst he spoke hoarsely:

"Who and what are you? Why are you here?"

"Bertrand Gordon, of Lamington, so please your Grace. I came here to seek Robert Cochrane, who has defamed me in your esteem, who has endeavoured to force

from me this lady whose troth has been long plighted to me. I thought to find here him who has this night foully murdered your royal brother, the Earl of Mar."

"Have you proof of that? Give it to me if you have, and his head shall answer for it."

"I have no other proof than the averment of a faithful servant of his lordship, who, on discovering what had been done, rode post haste to Linlithgow, and made known his dread tidings to the Earl of Angus and Lord Gray."

"They are the avowed foes of Sir Robert Cochrane, and you yourself proclaim an enmity bitter as theirs."

"I have had bitter cause to do so, my liege."

"Why has not the messenger come to us? We are the proper head of the State,

and the nearest kin of him who has been slain—as you say."

"The man feared that Cochrane would be with your Majesty before him, and that you would give credit to whatever cunning lie he might devise, so that the courier would have suffered for his rashness in opposing his own unaided testimony to that of one so powerful."

"The knave must have given us little credit for judgment, else he would have known that in a matter so nearly affecting our own person we would have given it grave consideration, in despite of the little belief we might have given so wild a story."

"He erred in that, my liege; but the man deemed it more respectful to you that the charge should be made known by the tongues of those who were privileged to speak frankly in your presence."

"And therefore sought the help of gentlemen whose feud with the accused would at once cast discredit on their accusation. But the matter shall be looked to. Where is the fellow, and what is his tale?"

"He asserts that when his master entered his bath, he was not permitted to attend him. Two hours later he was summoned to the room, and there beheld Mar dead. He had been smothered—by accident Cochrane and the others stated—but he was assured in his own mind that it was not so. When he sought to uncover the throat of his master he was prevented by Cochrane; and when he craved permission to leave the house it was denied him. He made his escape by stealth, and rode hither to tell what had been done." *

* Historians are not agreed as to whether the Earl of Mar was smothered in his bath or bled to death.

"And on the word of a mere scullion you charge Sir Robert Cochrane with murder! It is like an enemy to transform an accident into a crime."

"He was no scullion, sire, but the faithful follower and close friend of your royal brother, a gentleman by birth and training."

"Cochrane has been my attached follower, and one whose genius lifts him to a level with the proudest of those whose ignorance despises him."

"I see that it is useless to debate this further with your Majesty."

"It is no matter for debate, sir," said the King, irritably, and now oblivious to the fears which a little while ago had rendered him so distraught: it is a matter for proof, and the proof you shall produce, or by our royal hand you shall pay the forfeit of this most villainous charge. What sound is that?"

Katherine hastened to the entrance, and peered forth.

"Armed men, your Grace, descending the stairs with torches," she answered, in a quick undertone.

"Bar them out; do not let one of them enter," cried James, again beset by his alarm.

"There is no danger, sire," said Gordon, rising to his feet; "but if you will give me back my sword, none shall approach you save over my body, unless it be your pleasure."

The monarch, scarcely knowing what he did—forgetful of the distrust with which he had regarded Lamington, in his dread of those who approached now—flung the weapon to him.

Gordon sprang to the entrance sword in hand, just in time to encounter Cochrane, whose eyes were glistening with triumph,

and at whose back was a detachment of the royal guard.

"Hold there, all of you," cried Lamington. "Advance a step further, and it is at your peril."

"Stand aside, villain," retorted Cochrane, drawing. "Upon him, gentlemen, in the King's name."

"Cochrane," ejaculated Gordon, "on guard, sir, on guard."

"I strike for the King, and thank heaven we have arrived in time to rescue him from your murderous hands."

"That trick shall not serve you, sir," rejoined Lamington with ineffable scorn, for he detected at once the ground which his opponent purposed taking in charging him with an attempt upon the King's life.

Their swords crossed, and the gentlemen of the guard, partly because their leader blocked the entrance, and partly because

they had not much inclination to make a general attack upon one man, did not move to prevent the affray.

But his Majesty, as soon as he perceived the real state of affairs, advanced, addressing the combatants authoritatively.

"Put down your weapons, sirs, I command you. What, are private brawls to have vent in our presence? Down with your swords, and be thankful if the present confusion prove excuse enough for the disrespect you show us."

Cochrane, with a submissive bow, instantly obeyed, but Gordon hesitated. He was too hot to recognize the folly and impolicy of giving vent to the wrath which stirred within him at the sight of his foe, when the King laid his express command upon him to desist. The wrong which this man had done to him and to others seemed too monstrous to be laid

aside for a moment: it was like temporizing with the blackest guilt.

So he stood irresolute, his sword still raised, and glancing at the monarch questioningly, as if seeking his permission to renew the assault.

Katherine, with a woman's quickness, perceived the false impression which his conduct was likely to convey to all, and especially to James. She was by his side, and whispered eagerly—

"Obey—obey, for my sake, if not your own. Your hesitation will do more to hurt our cause than all the infamy that Cochrane may charge you with."

Still he hesitated, and the King, who at first observed his insubordination with surprise, now regarded him scowlingly, and with a return of all his worst suspicions concerning him.

The guard had by this time penetrated

the chamber, and their torches lit up the dark slimy walls of the vault. They surrounded their master, who, feeling himself secure from danger, and possessed of the power to give his authority effect, forgot the helpless condition in which Lamington had found him. Like all weak natures when suddenly released from trouble, his Majesty thought more of the indignities he had suffered than of those who had relieved him. He remembered in what questionable shape Gordon had appeared, and, overlooking the devotion he had displayed, was ready to vent upon him some of those pangs with which he had been afflicted in his humiliation—the memory of which was still painful to him.

The pause was a brief one.

"How, sir?" ejaculated the King irritably. "Has our misfortune so lowered us in your estimation that you set our

plain command at naught? By my faith, there is need for amendment here. You shall learn, sir, that if you have found us in a somewhat awkward dilemma, we have lost none of our power or the humour to punish treason. Something in your manner made us doubt that you could be the traitor you have been represented, albeit your actions gave full warrant for the charge. Our doubts are being cleared, thanks to your own stubbornness. Deliver up your sword, sir, and your affairs shall be dealt with as they merit."

"A prisoner!" exclaimed Lamington, unable to believe that his Majesty could mean to place him so completely at the mercy of his enemy.

The King made a haughty gesture in reply.

Cochrane, with a smile of satisfaction, furtively watched the effect of this new

sign of his triumph on the man he hated and, in some respects, feared.

The captain of the guard advanced a pace to receive the prisoner's sword. Lamington started back, his eyes glistening with indignation.

"Stay your hands, gentlemen, for by St. Andrew this is no fair duty that is put upon you, although it is the King who orders it." Then, turning towards his Majesty, "I came hither, sire, to-night, hoping to render you loyal service; that I did not come with any treacherous thought toward your Grace, your own conscience will bear witness. The high degree of the service I was but now about to give you, you will not be ready to own; but you should know that I would have saved you from the scorn which to-morrow all Scotland will cast upon its King when it learns that he has screened the murderer

of his brother from the just retribution which heaven and law call for."

The boldness of this speech astounded James, whilst the earnestness with which it was uttered impressed him sufficiently to recall the suspicions with which he had first received Cochrane's tidings of Mar's death. But the scornful reference to the blame which would attach to himself demanded a sharp retort.

"Peace, braggart! Are we not fitting judge of our own honour? Still brandishing your weapon in our face? Yield it up at once, or by my soul we shall attaint you with an attempt upon our royal person."

"Oh, sire, your own heart will tell you that there is no drop of treacherous blood in my veins. To your Grace I surrender my sword," he said, dropping it at the King's feet, "but to none other. Preserve it, sire, in memory of this night; and when

the end comes, which all men who love you foresee and dread, remember it is the sword that might have saved a throne."

Again the monarch was impressed by the passionate earnestness of his manner, which imparted to the words a tone of prophecy. He peered uneasily at the speaker's face, which was pale, and marked with an expression of regret! But the regret was for his Majesty, not for himself.

"Umph! He looks honest," muttered James to himself; and then glancing quickly at Cochrane, who was surveying the scene with placid content, "and, by my soul, the other looks less honest than he has ever seemed in my eyes before. But we will scrutinize this matter—we will prove it to the quick, and justice shall be done."

He nodded to the captain of the guard, who understood that movement as a sign

that he was to lead his prisoner away. Having picked up the sword, he turned to him.

During these passages Katherine had remained silent; but she had listened to everything, and she had heard everything with agonized suspense. Once or twice she had attempted to interrupt Gordon, in order to prevent his excitement betraying him into speech that could only have the worst consequence.

But when she observed with what content Cochrane was regarding her, she drew herself up and stood proud and calm awaiting the issue, whatever it might be, without any outward symptom of the dismay with which her heart was fluttering.

She felt that Lamington was speaking as became a loyal gentleman, and one who had been cruelly misapprehended and

wronged. She would not disgrace the love he bore her by any exhibition of a woman's weakness which could only distress him the more, without offering the slightest probability of helping him.

So she stood by his side, her hand resting on his arm; silent, but with a dignity in her bearing and a contempt in her regard of the King's favourite which expressed her testimony to the truth of all her lover said.

There were several amongst the gentlemen of the guard who envied Lamington the position he occupied, notwithstanding its peril, and who would have readily changed places with him, if she would have taken the same place by their side with the same devotion.

When he had done speaking those dangerous words of truth to the King, she pressed his arm tightly, and looked in his

face with a proud, sad smile that gave him comfort and strength.

"Thanks, Katherine, thanks," he whispered, huskily, whilst he took her hands, clasping them fondly with his own; "you at least understand me—but you will suffer with me. Ay, there is the cruel barb with which yonder wretch can reach my heart. But courage, Kate, courage; it is better for me that I should die an honourable man, striving to do loyal service to my King, than to live dishonoured and an exile, even with you to share my fate."

"I will share it, Bertrand, even if it be death; and I am prouder of your love now, when you seem to have sacrificed it and yourself by the rash words you have spoken to his Majesty, than I ever could have been had no cloud darkened our path."

"Brave heart, it is worth enduring their worst spite to know how much you love

me, and how worthy you are to be loved."

"Ah, Bertrand, it is in bitter moments such as these that hearts are tried, and mine tells me that you have acted nobly, although it trembles at the fury of to-morrow. But all is not lost yet, perhaps; the Queen is generous, and the King is just when he is permitted to follow the dictates of his own nature."

"Expect nothing from him—you have seen how his trust in Cochrane is undisturbed even by the murder of his brother."

"Then, if we find no release, no justice, you will fall, knowing that your country honours you, and that the King will sorely rue his own blindness and the wrong he has done you."

"That gives me little comfort whilst I know that you are left behind defenceless against that knave's snares."

"Not defenceless, whilst I can raise my arm with more than strength enough to carry a poniard home; and not defenceless whilst my brothers live."

That reference sent a thrill of sickness through Lamington, so that he was almost glad when the captain respectfully touched his arm.

This brief colloquy had taken place during the few moments his Majesty had spent in musing between the dictates of his better nature—which prompted him to release the prisoner and to accept his parole to be in attendance whenever he might be required—and the evil suggestions of his favourite, which counselled no mercy and no confidence.

His Majesty roused himself from his reverie with an impatient "Tush!" and, addressing Cochrane sharply:

"Is the palace clear? May the monarch

of Scotland crawl out of this rat's hole into which you thrust him and show himself again in his proper chambers?"

"The way is clear, so please your Majesty. Thanks to the prompt measures we adopted, your enemies are routed without a struggle."

"My enemies!" echoed the King, drily. "Ay, man, Rob, yonder chiel would have had me believe that they were yours, and not mine at all."

"Long may they be so, my liege, for so long will you reign in peace and content."

"Exactly," said James, slowly, eyeing his favourite with a searching glance, which that personage bore unmoved. "Come, we will quit this den; it smells too much of the charnel house to be pleasant, when we have time to note such trifling affairs—that is, trifling by the estimate of our blustering barons, who

have no finer sense than to know when a sword is well tempered or a bow-shaft straight."

Saying this in a manner which was a droll mixture of sarcastic contempt and humour, he began to move from the place.

"Your matters will be looked to in the morning, sir," he said, as he passed Lamington, and at the same time to Katherine: "Follow us, madam, that we may see you properly bestowed. We owe you so much for the labour you have undergone on our behalf."

He disappeared from the chamber, attended by Cochrane and twelve guardsmen.

Katherine dreading lest Cochrane should be sent back to seek her, hastily bade Gordon farewell, and followed. He, divining her reason, did not attempt to stay her.

CHAPTER XII.

THE QUEEN'S VICTORY.

"Then east and west the word has gane,
And soon to Branxholm Hall it flew,
That Elliot of Lairistan, he was slain,
And how or why no living knew."

The Laird of Lairistan.

THE triumph which Cochrane had obtained was due to the happy accident of the purpose of the conspirators being mistaken for an outbreak against the King in favour of the imprisoned Albany—an event which the wily favourite had caused his master to believe might take place at any moment.

The Queen knew how much reason his Majesty had given the nobles for displeasure in retaining as his prime confidant and adviser one so generally detested as Cochrane. She was conscious at the same time of something of her royal consort's weakness, whilst she could not be blind to the warlike merits of Albany, which had obtained for him the respect of the people, who were incapable of appreciating the finer qualities of their monarch. Aware of all this, she dreaded the approaching crisis; and, despite the assurances of Panther, at the first murmur of the advent of the angry barons she became alarmed for the King's safety.

A frightened attendant brought to her an exaggerated and distorted account of the appearance of the barons, and of the overpowering of the guard. Thereupon she had despatched Katherine to the King,

whilst she herself hastened to the sleeping chamber of the prince, that she might be prepared to protect him from any danger that might threaten his innocent head.

The apartment adjoined her own, and she entered it softly, in order not to waken the little sleeper. The ladies-in-waiting were careful to observe the same caution as their mistress; and as they only crossed the threshold, closing the door noiselessly behind them, the prince slept on undisturbed.

The Queen advanced to the couch, and, seating herself beside it, watched the calm face of her child—a fair, frank face, on which the passions of life had not yet imprinted any baleful line; but the shadow of the stormy future through which he was to pass to his chivalrous fall at Flodden seemed to be already lowering upon it. The affectionate eyes of the mother rested

on the child with the greedy devotion of one gazing upon a treasure that is in peril of being stolen.

The arrival of Angus and his companions was announced by a loud summons at the outer door, and then by the heavy tread of armed men in the apartments which the ladies had just quitted. The summons was presently repeated at the door of the prince's room.

It had been bolted by the ladies-in-waiting, who now looked anxiously to their mistress for instructions.

"Undo the bar and let them enter," said Margaret, calmly, although she was very pale, and instinctively cast her arm round her son to give him all the protection of which she was capable.

Angus entered first, frowning, and his huge form drawn to its full height in the wrath which swelled his breast. He was

followed by Lord Gray, quiet and respectful, and immediately after entered the Abbot, who had remained behind an instant to persuade the others to remain outside.

Their entrance wakened the prince, who started up with an exclamation of half wonder and half fear. But as soon as he recognized the persons who occupied the chamber, he rose to his knees smiling, and resting a hand on his mother's shoulder, he cried—

"Is it morning, cousin Angus? and are we bound a-hawking?"

"The hawks are on the wing already, so please your highness, but the quarry is out of sight, and I fear our humour would not make the sport pleasing to you," answered the earl, gruffly.

The boy was astonished by the manner of this reply, and looked with an expression of childish puzzlement from the speaker to the Queen.

"Do they fly hawks in the palace now?" he inquired, simply.

"The hawk flies whither its prey leads," said Angus.

"I trust, my Lord Angus, the prey has not led you here," said Margaret, with quiet dignity.

"It is even so, madam, for we seek the King."

"Has he frightened you, mother? I felt you start," said the prince; and then, turning to the earl, his fair face flushed with childish indignation, "Angus, you are saucy because you are so big; but I will be big too, some day."

"Heaven grant it so," replied the earl, with rough sincerity, "and wherefore, as your highness would bid me beware how I carry myself now, I accept the reminder."

"I would remind you, too, Angus, that

nobody stands covered in my mother's presence except the King."

The boy was standing up on his couch now, and was pronouncing his admonitions with a gravity that would have been laughable at any other time.

Angus, instead of being annoyed by the singular address of the young prince, was so far pleased that his frown faded under an expression of admiration.

"That check also I accept from your highness with proper submission," he responded, whilst he removed the plumed hat from his head, "and say again, heaven grant you long life, and may your present spirit lose no whit of its bravery as years advance."

"So say we and all Scotland," added the Abbot, with solemnity.

"Your Majesty will pardon the neglect I have shown without meaning offence,"

continued Angus; "the evil humour which the sorry events of this night have roused in me must plead my excuse. Your Grace knows that I have as little of the courtier's fine ways as of his baseness; but rough as my bearing may be, you have no more devoted servant than Archibald Douglas."

"We believe it, Angus," said the Queen, with confidence, "and in that belief your offence is already pardoned. Now tell us the meaning of this untimely visit with armour on, and angry brows. My lords, you look, all of you, more like a band of dangerous rebels than of liege men who seek redress or justice at the hands of their sovereign."

"So please your Grace," said the Abbot, "these gentlemen have been much disturbed to-night by a tale which is too horrible for your Majesty's ears, and they seek the King, that prompt retribution may

be taken. Not finding his Grace, and fearing that he has been ill-advised—as has happened more than once before—to shun the audience which we all demand in the great name of justice, we have come hither to pray our gracious Queen to use what influence she can command to obtain for us the immediate audience we desire."

"What is the tale you deem too horrible for me to hear?" Margaret inquired. "If wrong has been done, it is well that we should know it, since you desire our aid in its requital. Speak, and be assured that our anxiety for the public weal is more than strong enough to overcome all private weakness."

"The Earl of Mar is murdered," said Angus, bluntly.

"Uncle Mar killed!" cried the prince, his eyes starting in astonishment; "and will I never see him again?"

"Not in this world, your highness."

"Oh, who has done that? He is a traitor, and we cut off traitors' heads."

"Robert Cochrane has done it; and we call upon the King to do justice to himself, to his dead brother, and to the people," responded the earl, warmly.

"Give him to Angus, mother," exclaimed the prince, excitedly; "give him to Angus, and let him deal with the cruel man."

The Queen had been startled and distressed by the ominous tidings, for she saw at once how much danger there was of the King being suspected of complicity in the crime, if he were not already suspected, as the words of Angus seemed to imply. She experienced much alarm, too, in the thought that his Majesty would be, more than likely, deceived by the plausible explanation which his favourite would be sure to have ready

for him; and thus draw upon himself a still greater share of popular disfavour, and discontent with his government.

As soon as she had recovered from the first shock of dismay and surprise, she bade the prince be silent, and directed two of her ladies-in-waiting to attend him, whilst she led the way into her own audience chamber.

His highness was not pleased to be deprived of the interesting conversation in which he had taken so active a part; and as Angus was slowly following the Queen he called to him to come back.

"What will you do with Cochrane?" he queried, resting his hand on the earl's wrist and looking up inquisitively at his stern face.

"What would your highness wish to be done with him?"

The prince reflected, whilst his finger

mechanically traced the links of the earl's corslet.

"Give me your sword," he said presently.

Angus humoured the boy, and unsheathed his weapon.

Grasping the hilt with both hands, the prince exerted all his strength to raise the heavy sword, his eyes sparkling with enthusiasm the while.

"If I could only hold this up," he said, slowly, "I would strike the bad man down, and I would help the good man to keep his ground."

"And I would stand by your highness whilst my hand could gripe a weapon. Good-night, and pleasant dreams."

Angus hastened to rejoin his companions. He found them all standing before her Majesty, who was seated on a large chair of state, and apparently waiting only for his appearance.

"My lord of Angus," she said, deliberately, "the business which you have thrust upon us to-night is not one to be disposed of with the rude haste which you and our other friends seem to desire. The matter concerns our nearest interests, and must be dealt with resolutely, but not with the unbecoming haste which partakes more of the character of vengeance than of justice."

"The penalty of a deed such as this, madam," said Angus, "should be enforced without pause of any kind."

"Ay, if you are sure that you have found the guilty one."

"And we are sure of that."

"Who has seen Mar, and can attest that he has perished as you say?"

"We have certain tidings of his fate, madam, and we know too much of Cochrane to doubt his guilt or his object."

"My lords, I fear the little favour which you bear the man has caused you to judge him with more haste than your calmer humours would hold wise."

"So please your Grace," broke in Lord Gray, "we have known the man too long not to have had more than time enough to judge of him with all due discretion. I am not one hasty to decide upon a violent action; but I pledge myself and those who are with me that the peace of the country will be endangered if Robert Cochrane is permitted to remain another day at Court—ay, if he is even permitted to live after this night's work."

"Your verdict, my Lord Gray, carries weight with it, and without doubt it is given upon due consideration. But we must act in this affair in open court, and to-morrow that shall be done by his Majesty and yourselves in council."

"To-morrow? Why not to-night?" ejaculated Angus.

"Because to-night we have no clear proof that this foul crime has been committed by one who is your avowed enemy; and to-morrow we will know the best and worst. Retire, then, gentlemen, for to-night; and we pledge our royal word that there shall be no let or hindrance to the deliberation and decision of the council to-morrow."

There was a general expression of disappointment on the countenances of the noblemen, who glanced from one to another, dissatisfied, but hesitating what reply should be given to her Majesty's proposal. All felt that by the morning Cochrane would have so wrought upon the king that it would be impossible to obtain his concession to the verdict which they would unanimously pronounce. Nothing but the

sincere respect they entertained for the Queen could have prevented them at once repudiating even the short delay for which she asked.

Observing their hesitation she rose to her feet, as if preparatory to dismissing them.

"My lords, I call upon you as leal friends and subjects to yield to my request," she said, quietly.

"Madam, you could not have put our fealty to a severer test," responded Gray; "but I for one will prove it at the risk of whatever may hap to-morrow, and I submit to your Grace's will."

The others, although aware of the probability that when the council met they might find themselves stand in the position of the accused instead of the accusers, immediately followed the example Gray had set. All proclaimed their devotion to her Majesty,

and their submission to her will, and they slowly retired.

Angus alone remained dourly silent, leaning on the hilt of his long sword. He was the last to move from his position. Starting from what appeared to be a gloomy reverie, he made a stiff salutation, and was about to withdraw, but he stopped, and approached the Queen.

"We yield to your Majesty," he said, somewhat huskily, and with a degree of agitation; "but to-morrow you will regret that you have driven us to it, and to-morrow we shall regret that we obeyed."

Margaret was not insensible to the probability that the grim prophecy would be fulfilled, but she only said:

"We will pray that the event may prove otherwise, my lord."

The earl bowed stiffly, and without another word withdrew.

That was the end of the outbreak which had threatened to become so serious. Angus and his companions retired with their followers to their respective lodgings in the town, and they appointed vigilant watches during the night to give them timely warning of any attempted reprisal from the palace. Not one of them felt sure of liberty or life so long as the King remained under the control of his favourites.

But Cochrane was too well pleased to avail himself of the advantage which their unexpected retreat gave him to think of taking offensive steps immediately. He could not guess the reason of their sudden change of policy; and he did not trouble himself much to inquire. It was enough for him that their present conduct would to all appearance confirm the representations he had made to the sovereign. It would be difficult for them to eradicate the first

impressions made on the King and by-and-by there would be opportunity found to retaliate.

He knew that it would be a hopeless venture to deal with the barons collectively; for then even all the power of his Majesty would only stand a chance of victory, and he could not count upon support to the last extremity. But he was satisfied that he could deal with his foes individually, mighty as they were; and he was content to bide his time. He was pursuing the cautious policy by which James II. had triumphed over the rebellious nobles of his reign.

Meanwhile every circumstance seemed to combine to further his more immediate interests. He already looked forward to the crowning object of his ambition—the title of the murdered Mar—as almost within his grasp. Next to that object in import-

ance to him, if not equal to it, was the subjugation of Katherine, and that, too, he did not doubt of achieving.

Although apparently enjoying perfect freedom in her position as an attendant on Queen Margaret, she was under the constant surveillance of his spies. Lamington was now a prisoner, and he would take care that the charge against him was so coloured that his escape from the block or the scaffold would be impossible.

And so with all these favouring winds filling his sails he saw a clear course to harbour; for even Katherine must succumb to the wiles with which he was gradually surrounding her.

It was, therefore, with much secret self-congratulation that he followed James back to his proper apartments, and when Katherine craved permission to return immediately to the Queen with the tidings that

his Majesty was safe, Cochrane made no attempt to interrupt her, or to attend her as she had feared he would.

The relief she experienced from this event would have been considerably decreased if she could have divined that he allowed her to seem free only because he felt so sure of his power over her. She hastened to her generous guardian to make known the plight of Lamington and to crave her assistance in defending and rescuing him.

Cochrane informed his Majesty that his manœuvre in summoning the soldiers from the town had been successful in driving the rebel barons to flight.

The King was morose and silent; he listened to the explanation without expressing any opinion, and then informed his favourite that he might retire.

Cochrane was slightly perplexed by this

humour, but affected not to perceive it, although his dismissal for the night had come sooner than he had expected. There were several matters upon which he desired to be informed before withdrawing.

"Has your Grace any commands for the morning?" he asked.

"None."

"No instructions regarding the arraignment and execution of the ruffian, Gordon of Lamington?"

"Arraignment and execution! By my faith, Cochrane, you seem to have judged and condemned the youth without troubling us about a trial."

"He drew his sword against your gracious person," exclaimed the courtier, with an air of loyal horror; "he was at the head of those unruly spirits who forced their way into the palace, and he is the son of an attainted traitor. To those who love

your Majesty there can be little hesitation as to the judgment to be pronounced against him."

"Those who love my Majesty will wait till they know our decision on the subject," was the dry response; "the youth had no intent against us, and we have no mind at present to give him either to the block or to the hangman."

"If your Grace is satisfied of his innocence, I must be silent," said Cochrane, humbly; "but there are considerations which should not be overlooked."

"Nothing shall be overlooked."

"Then your present decision will be altered, sire; for the kindness of your heart must yield to the clearness of your judgment, and that will satisfy you of the necessity to punish this open treason against your government, promptly and unrelentingly.

"That may be," said the King, with a movement of his hand, peremptorily closing the interview.

"That shall be," mentally ejaculated Cochrane, as he made a low obeisance and withdrew.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DUNGEON OF THE PALACE.

"'Come in, pretty Captain Ogilvie,
And drink of the beer and the wine;
And thou shalt have gold and silver
To count till the clock strikes nine.'

"'I'll have none of your gold and silver,
Nor none of your white money;
But I'll have bonnie Jeanie Gordon,
And she shall go now with me.'"

Old Ballad.

LAMINGTON was conducted by Captain Murray, and four gentlemen of the guard, to a cell which possessed the appropriate attributes of strength and gloom. The heavy door, which groaned with its own weight

in opening; the bare, dark walls, and the narrow slit, high up near the roof, which was the only aperture for the admission of light and air, combined to impress the prisoner with a due sense of his own helplessness.

"I wish we might have offered you better quarters, sir," said Murray, respectfully; "but a private command, whispered to me by Sir Robert Cochrane, leaves me no option save to treat you with the utmost rigour, as if you had been already condemned."

"He is my enemy," answered Gordon, indifferently; "and for the present he holds me at advantage. Like enough, he may carry his purpose so far as to afford you an hour's amusement at my execution. If he succeed, so much the happier for himself—if he fail, my turn will come. But to you, captain, I am as much indebted

for the wish to use me better, as if you had been permitted to treat me like a royal guest."

The captain smiled gruefully.

"By St. Andrew! I might construe your thanks otherwise than you mean them, sir, for royal guests, nowadays, fare worst of any, as you ken."

Gordon shrugged his shoulders.

"Your jest reminds me that I may bid good-bye to the world, since even the nearest kin of the throne is at the mercy—"

"Hold, hold," interrupted the captain, hastily; "I understand you, and we need have no names. I spoke enow in bitter sorrow, not in jest. But the nearer the wolf comes to the hearth the closer he is to the guidman's axe."

"Ay; but if the wolf have the axe firm under his claws, the chance is that the guidman himself will be the victim."

"Saints guard us from that mischance!" exclaimed the captain. "Can we send you anything to relieve the tedium of your lodging?"

"If you can leave me a light, that is all I care for. Thanks again."

"You shall have it."

Captain Murray not only provided him with a lantern, but caused a couch to be carried from his own room into the cell for the accommodation of the prisoner, who, without this unusual kindness, would have had to content himself with a stone bench when he might desire to sit or to repose. The generosity of his keeper, however, did not extend farther than the effort to make the cell a degree more endurable. The captain, although he understood the real object of the conspiracy, and sympathized with it, was still attentive to his duty, and saw that the door of the prison was properly secured and guarded.

Despite the gloom of the dungeon, Gordon experienced at first a sense of indifference which puzzled himself. There was no shrinking dread of the morrow, no sharp pangs of doubt, although his fortunes were now brought to a more critical pass than they had ever been before. His life depended on the feather's weight which might turn the King's verdict for or against him; and there could be, he fancied, small question that the influence of the royal minion, Cochrane, would be more than enough to doom him, even if the proofs of his apparently treasonable intents had been more difficult to find than they were.

It was the very desperation of the circumstances which rendered him almost callous to his seemingly inevitable fate. Two thoughts, however, materially aided to produce the extraordinary calmness of which he was conscious. The first was,

that Katherine would be safe under the protection of the Queen, whatever befell him. The second was, that at his trial he would have the opportunity of denouncing Cochrane in open court as a false knave, and the assassin of the Earl of Mar.

"I will dare him to the proof in the lists," exclaimed the prisoner, pacing his dungeon, eyes kindling and countenance flushed with the excitement of the prospect. "If he refuse to make good his truth at hazard of his life, then his guilt will stand confessed before the court and the world. The King must be satisfied then of the character of the wretch he has trusted."

The passion with which the bare prospect filled him made the gloomy walls of his dungeon light as those of the most luxuriously appointed chamber; and ren-

dered the bolts and bars which confined him of as little account as if the least motion of his finger could have undone them.

He was sharply recalled to the consciousness of his immediate surroundings by the harsh grating of the key in the massive lock, and then by the creaking of the door as it swung slowly open.

He fancied that it was the captain of the guard returning with some new sign of friendliness, and he turned to meet him frankly.

His eyes opened wide with curiosity as he perceived that his visitor was a man whose build differed greatly from that of his good-natured custodian, and that he was closely muffled in a large black cloak which almost touched his heels. A tall man, whose person was effectually concealed by the cloak. His brow and eyes were almost

hidden by his plain, black hat, which he had drawn down for that purpose, until it touched his nose.

The door had closed behind this personage, and he stood near it, quietly examining the prisoner, but making no attempt to speak.

After the first second of simple astonishment Gordon began to be suspicious of his visitor's object. He had heard of such things as of men being found dead in the dungeons to which they had been consigned to await trial, whenever that trial threatened in any way to harm a powerful opponent. He was convinced that Cochrane was capable of adopting a measure of that kind without compunction, if it promised to relieve him of the smallest trouble.

So Gordon was presently speculating upon the probability that the person before

him was intended to act as his executioner. The silence of the man and his curious gaze seemed to confirm the suspicion.

If that had been his purpose the fellow was in no hurry to begin the work, for he was motionless as well as silent for several minutes.

"I bear a message to your knightship," said the stranger at length, in a low, and as the hearer fancied, a feigned voice.

"From whom?—there are few friends of mine who could obtain admission for you to this place."

"The message is from his gracious Majesty, King James."

"His Grace has a passion for droll servants," said Lamington, who detected something in the voice which jarred upon his ear, and heightened the suspicion he

had already entertained concerning the man; "but give me the despatch."

"It is not written."

"Then repeat it to me."

"His Majesty sent me to throw open the door of your dungeon and to give you safe conduct from the palace."

"How, he has sent you to release me?" exclaimed Lamington, astounded by this remarkable contradiction to all his conjectures.

"Such is his gracious pleasure," said the man, coldly.

"Heaven shield his Majesty," cried the relieved prisoner; "his own kind heart has been for once permitted to obey the dictates of justice and generosity. To-morrow I will thank him in person, and will be ready to answer to the council for anything I may be charged with. Meanwhile, I am grateful to you, sir, as the bearer of the

King's message, and crave your forgiveness for the hard thoughts with which I have been regarding you." The man bowed courteously, but made no movement to open the door, whilst he said:

"You cannot understand my conduct, and therefore you are blameless for the misjudgment of your thought."

"I do not understand your answer, sir, further than that you accept my excuse. On another occasion we may have leisure to exchange explanations. Meanwhile, I will pass out with you at once; for short as my acquaintance with this den has been, I know enough of it to long for more airy quarters. Pass on, sir, if it please you."

"Your knightship is somewhat hasty."

"What now?"

"You have not heard all that I am instructed to repeat."

"Then, in the saint's name, say it, man, and have done."

"When you quit the palace there will be a horse waiting for you, and a sum sufficient for your immediate requirements, if you are not already provided in that respect," continued the messenger.

"His Majesty is most considerate," commented Gordon, his former suspicions beginning to revive. "Proceed. I am provided with a steed and money. What further benefit would his Grace confer?"

"He would save you from the certain doom which awaits you here, and which will reach you as surely as the sun will rise to-morrow, if in any obstinate humour you renounce the mercy that is extended to you."

"What does his Grace command?"

"That you take the horse, ride to the most convenient port from which you may

sail in secrecy to France or Germany, and swear by your knightly honour, by your faith in heaven, that you will not now, or at any time after, seek to communicate with any man or woman in Scotland."

"What, is it the command of his Grace that I should fly like a dastard, and remain for ever an outlaw to friends as well as to foes?"

"It is so; his Majesty is most mercifully disposed toward you, and offers you this means of escape. Go, and there are the prospects of an honourable future open to you; or remain, and be hung like any common malefactor."

Lamington grew pale and red by turns: the indignity which the mere proposal of this wretched course cast upon him was harder to bear than the probability of being consigned to the scaffold. He had difficulty in restraining his passion; but

with what calmness he could master, he said:

"There is a lady in the palace whose estimation is of some little importance in my eyes—nay, I will confess to you that I would wish her to be the companion of my flight."

"You must not even attempt to inform her that you have fled," said the man, with a flash of vehemence for which there was nothing apparent to account."

Gordon smiled with his teeth clenched, and bent his head to hide his grim expression. He had discovered one probable meaning of this peculiar offer of his Majesty.

He appeared to reflect for an instant. Then looking up quickly:

"You will not refuse me a slight service, sir?"

"If it does not interfere with my duty."

"It will not, you may trust me. See, here is a ring—a lady's gift. I would ask you to restore it to the giver, if I am to part from friends and country as you say the King commands. Will you examine it?"

The man unguardedly approached.

Lamington, with a quick sweep of his hand, removed his visitor's hat, and drew the cloak down from the face, revealing Sir Robert Cochrane, who started back in some confusion.

Gordon laughed contemptuously at the discomfiture of his rival. The moment he had been told that the condition of his release was that he should take immediate and secret flight, he concluded that the proposal could only come from Cochrane. He next became satisfied that the messenger was the man himself. To make sure of it he feigned to be yielding to the

measure; and, as he had rightly calculated, Sir Robert's eagerness betrayed him.

The laugh and the look of scorn with which the prisoner regarded the chief favourite of a monarch, chagrined that personage more than the mere exposure of his subterfuge could have done. His sallow visage darkened, his thin lips quivered, and his hand involuntarily sought the hilt of the poniard, which hung at his girdle.

"Nay, never heed your weapon, man," said Gordon; "you will not need its help against me at present. I hate you too much to give you the chance of saving yourself, by my removal or your own fall, from the ignominy that lies before you. My retribution must be made in the broad light of day, that the people may see the destruction your own treachery has brought upon you."

"You are confident of results."

"I am confident that justice will not miscarry this time. I will denounce you before the council, and you dare not refuse my challenge to the proof of combat. You have foreseen my course, foreseen your danger, and that is why you are here to attempt by a silly trick to make me baffle my own project."

"I offered you liberty."

"Ay, but without all that renders liberty worth having—you offered me liberty without honour and without Katherine. But I shall have it with both."

Cochrane bowed his head, and stood for several moments in gloomy reflection. Gordon had correctly surmised his motive in acting the strange part he had done.

"You have quite decided," said Cochrane at length, in a tone of perfect self-possession; "you refuse the offer I have made to

you, and you mean to stand the hazard of whatever may follow?"

"That is my intent," was the response, with a mocking bow.

"I am sorry for that," continued the favourite, coldly; "for you will drive me to extremities that I desired to avoid."

"Do what you will, I can meet your worst spite."

"And fall as others have done who had the power and friends to support them that you have not."

"I do not reckon my chances by the fate of others. I count only that there is a false knave to be punished, and that fate has made my own fortune dependent on his destruction. My hands have been directed to the task, and for its accomplishment I am prepared to sacrifice life, if need be—I am prepared to risk the loss of Katherine, who is more to me than life."

Cochrane was not moved in the slightest by this outburst; he only paused a second before replying.

"Your defiance is bravely spoken, sir, and I can respect courage even when it is opposed to myself. You will answer me one question: is it only for the sake of winning her that you seek my ruin?"

"I seek your ruin, Cochrane, not only for her sake, but for the King's and my country's."

"Then you would not consent to leave Scotland even if I resigned her to you?"

"No—not now."

"You are sure of that?" (Slowly and reflectively.)

"So sure that if Katherine herself came here, and all the doors of the palace were thrown open to me, and she prayed me to fly, I would not budge till I was assured that you were delivered to the hangman."

Cochrane drew a long breath, and there was a venomous glitter in his eyes, although he spoke calmly.

"Since your resolve is so fixed, I will make no further effort to move it. But before we part now you shall understand me better than you do at present."

"I will be amazed if you can make me see your black purposes clearer than I do."

"I only wish you to know why it is that I concern myself so much in your affairs. By your own determination there is feud between us to the death. I will tell you why I take the trouble to accept the challenge. I sought the hand of Katherine Janfarie because her father and his kinsmen could command the service of a goodly troop of Border riders. But had you shown yourself before the contract was sealed between us I would have withdrawn my

claim rather than have thwarted the lady's humour."

"Why did you deny her appeal to your forbearance?"

"Because I thought her like most other women, disturbed only by a silly fancy, which would soon change when she understood the position to which I destined her; and because she made her appeal too late. Perhaps the passion she inspired in me had something to do with it, and perhaps the whim which at times influences me to seize that which seems most difficult of attainment, prevented me yielding to her appeal. No matter now; she proved her obstinacy, and you proved your power over her when matters had advanced so far that for me to have retreated would have been to show myself the veriest poltroon."

"Why repeat all this to me? I am not your confessor."

"Bide a little. You and I are not likely to hold another gossip so calmly," he said, with a grim smile. "A few words more and I am done. It has been my fortune to climb high, and it has been necessary in my course to encounter many obstacles. They only served to give my resolution ardour, and those impediments which I could not stride over I crushed under my foot without hesitation and without remorse."

"Of all that I have been long aware."

"You know it from my own lips now. Know also that you of yourself would have been too petty to have ruffled my humour for an hour. But Katherine's love has made you one of those impediments in my path which must be ground to earth without mercy. I would have spared your life, for that seemed the readiest method of removing you. But the conditions do not

please you; so I must accept your defiance and act upon it. I have never failed yet to exterminate the wretched creature who opposed my will; you have defied it."

"And will do so to the last."

"So be it. Good-night."

Cochrane resumed his hat and cloak, and with a courteous obeisance, retired.

The heavy door was locked and barred when he quitted the dungeon, and Gordon was left to meditate upon the possible and probable results of the defiance he had given to the powerful favourite, whose word could open every door of the palace, and whose beck would be obeyed by ready assassins.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN JEOPARDY.

"Sternly he spoke—'Tis sweet to hear
In good greenwood the bugle blown,
But sweeter to Revenge's ear
To drink a tyrant's dying groan.

"Your slaughtered quarry proudly trod,
At dawning morn o'er dale and down,
But prouder baseborn Murray rode
Thro' old Linlithgow's crowded town.'"

Cadyow Castle.

THE fatigues he had undergone had the happy effect of soothing the prisoner to slumber, in spite of the excited state of his mind caused by anticipations of the trial in the morning.

The sunlight which penetrated the narrow slit in the wall of the dungeon did not relieve the gloom of the place, but rather served to heighten it by suggesting the brilliance of the day without.

That was Gordon's first fancy when he wakened from his sleep. He could not help contrasting the dismal aspect of his lodging with the glory of light and freedom which was denied to him, although the poorest scullion of the palace might enjoy it.

But his repose had refreshed him, and with the buoyancy of health and courage, he resisted the despondent humour which his position was calculated to inspire. He was eager for the hour of trial, confident that the King would acquit him of any treacherous design against his royal person; and confident that in any case he would have the opportunity of publicly denouncing

Cochrane and challenging him to the test of combat.

He requested the attendant who brought him food to inform Captain Murray that he desired to speak with him. The man promised obedience.

Occasionally the prisoner could hear the tramp of armed men, and the clatter of horses' hoofs in the palace square. At intervals the sharp tone of some officer's command would sound faintly in his cell, or the distant baying of a hound would strike his ear. But everything heard from that place had a dull tone which grated upon his ears, and would have saddened him, had he not been too busy inventing possible reasons for the delay in bringing him before the court.

Hours passed, and still no one came for him. The buoyancy with which he had encountered the first despondent thoughts

of the morning deserted him, and his vague speculations wrought his mind to a pitch of anxiety that verged on frenzy.

When the daylight had gradually faded from the dungeon, leaving weird shadows on the walls in the short, dull gloaming which linked the intervening moments of light and darkness, he sat down.

He was forced at length to the conviction that for some reason his trial had been postponed.

Gloomy as the conviction was, it relieved him, for it was a satisfaction to know anything definitely. The perturbation of expectancy is always harder to bear than the knowledge of a disagreeable certainty.

The gloaming faded, and he was left in deep darkness. He was exhausted by the monotonous promenade of his prison, and much more by the mental exercise which he had been making all day, so that he fell

into a species of listless reverie which rendered him for the time insensible to his circumstances.

He was roused by the opening of his door and the rays of a lantern flashing upon his eyes, dazing them for a moment.

It was Captain Murray who entered. His countenance was disturbed and somewhat pale.

"I never saw friend more welcome," cried Gordon, starting up and recognizing the captain.

The latter bowed in a constrained fashion, and it was evident that he experienced no pleasure in yielding to the prisoner's request to see him.

"You desired to see me," he said, in an abrupt manner. "We have been in constant waiting upon his Majesty all day, else I would have been here earlier. I am even now under command to be ready at any

instant to attend his Grace; therefore you will understand my time is brief."

Lamington regarded him curiously: the whole bearing of the man was so much changed that he was puzzled to account for it.

"I note, sir, that something has occurred to alter your disposition towards me——"

"Nothing can occur to alter my disposition towards you; but I am under commands which render it difficult for me to speak frankly with you. I trust you will not question me further on that score."

Lamington felt a chill of dismay pass over him; but he inclined his head with the courtesy due to the soldier whose heart was clearly so much opposed to the command which his duty compelled him to obey.

"Do not answer me, Captain Murray, if I unwittingly make any inquiry which

you should not reply to. My first question is, Has the council met to-day?"

"It has."

"And the result is that Cochrane has been delivered into your hands, a prisoner?"

"The result is," said the captain, with signs of agitation in his voice, "that Angus, Lord Gray, and a dozen nobles beside, have, with all their followers, withdrawn from the court, and to-morrow attainders will be declared against many of the best gentlemen in Scotland."

"Merciful powers! Then the assassin of Mar still rules the King?"

"Sir Robert Cochrane has been closeted with his Majesty since the council broke up in haste and anger; and through him have issued all the commands which we must obey."

Gordon clasped his hands tightly, and his teeth became clenched in despair.

"That is why I have not been summoned to answer the charges he has to make against me. It may be that I am already condemned, without trial, and without the barest opportunity to defend myself."

"I cannot answer you."

There was a pause. Then Gordon, with quivering lips:

"And your silence assures me of the truth of my conjecture. But it cannot be. Scotland will not allow this mockery of all law and justice to be done, even when it passes under the warrant of the King, for he is blinded and deceived. No, by heaven, this shall not be——"

"Pardon me, sir. I cannot hear more of this wild outcry."

With a huge effort Gordon checked the outburst of indignation to which he had been on the point of giving vent. Even at that moment, when he seemed to have

been thrown entirely into the hands of his remorseless enemy, he could respect the position of Captain Murray, who, although fully sympathizing with all that he might say, would have accounted himself a traitor if he had listened to it whilst he held the command of the royal guard.

"The words I have spoken," he said, huskily, "are too sadly true to be recalled; but for having uttered them in your presence, sir, I crave your indulgence."

"I have already forgotten."

"I am your debtor. But I will not transgress further on your kindness. I can wait now to meet the worst whenever it may come."

The captain, with an awkward salute, drew back toward the door, then halted, and spoke with an uneasiness which he endeavoured to conceal by an assumption of gruffness.

"There is one waiting without who bears the King's signet, and who may be able to give you the satisfaction I dare not —and, in sooth, care not to give."

Not waiting for any reply he withdrew, leaving the light he had brought for the convenience of the prisoner.

Lamington was satisfied by what little the captain had said, and by his manner, that Cochrane had again succeeded in exercising his baleful influence over the King to the serious peril of his government. If Angus and the others had quitted the Court in anger and contempt, then rebellion would be the probable consequences as soon as the forces of the barons could be collected; and in the mean while Cochrane's will would be the only law observed.

The prisoner saw his own fate—a secret and ignominious death, without even the

poorest chance of unmasking the knave whose mysterious power over the monarch was being exercised to the distraction of the kingdom.

He clasped his hands upon his head, and threw himself on the couch, utterly hopeless and helpless. now. The prospect which rendered his imprisonment endurable had been suddenly swept away from him; and there was nothing left to do but to prepare to meet, with the calmness which became a man of honour, the vengeance which Cochrane would speedily take.

"Bertrand!"

The voice was sad and sweet. It roused him like the spell of an enchanter, and, turning, he saw Katherine dressed from head to foot in black.

CHAPTER XV.

A FATAL LOVE.

"'A boon, a boon, my noble liege,
A boon I beg o' thee!
And the first boon I come to crave
Is to grant me the life of young Logie.'

"'O na, O na, my Margaret,
Forsooth, and so it manna be,
For a' the gowd o' fair Scotland
Shall not save the life o' young Logie.'"

The Laird of Logie.

HER appearance at that moment of despair was like a glare of sunlight to one who has been long immured in darkness. He sprang toward her with a glad cry of welcome, and folded her in his arms.

His delight was too great to permit him to observe immediately the ashen hue of her features, and the strange coldness with which she submitted to his caress without acknowledging it by any word or movement. Some cruel sorrow had left its imprint on her face and dimmed the brightness of her eyes. She stared over his shoulder as if she were gazing at some sad spectacle afar off that stunned her senses to all that was transpiring near her.

"Heaven is merciful," he said, huskily, "in giving me the joy of holding you once again in my arms before death parts us."

She shuddered, and bowed her head.

"Look up, Kate, look up; for if there be no hope for me you will live to see the villain whose treachery has doomed us to this misery pay the penalty of his crimes. His hour will come, and trust me, darling,

it will come speedily, or I read the signs of his fate badly."

"That will not save you," she said, in a low, tremulous voice.

"No; but we will have at least this satisfaction of knowing that my fall will hasten his overthrow."

"You have heard, then, what has happened to-day?"

She spoke in an abstracted tone, and as if there were something preying on her mind, the nature of which she desired to conceal.

"I have heard enough to know that I am in Cochrane's power, and that means death to me—separation from you for ever in this world."

She raised her head, and gazed in his face with a curious yearning expression, as if she were seeking there the confirmation of some unhappy suspicion.

"Separation there must be, Bertrand," she said, sadly, "but not by death, I hope."

"How? What chance is there that Cochrane will permit me to escape him?"

"None."

"And has he not regained the King's favour, in spite of Mar's death under his hand?"

"He has regained it all, by what trickery I cannot tell. But he is more powerful than ever; and in requital of the foul slanders which you and others have uttered against him, his Majesty has agreed to give him the title of his dead brother and to create him Earl of Mar."

Gordon was astounded by this new proof of the deluded King's weakness.

"It is an act of madness that will cost him his throne," he exclaimed. "But you cannot be rightly informed; such monstrous

contempt of nobles and people alike would be opposed by Cochrane himself as too perilous even for his ambition to profit by."

"His ambition knows no fear. His Grace's own lips gave me the intelligence of the new honour he had conferred on his favourite."

"The King told you! Wherefore should he tell you?"

Katherine quietly released herself from his arms, and proceeded to answer him in a cold, steady voice.

"Listen, Bertrand, and you shall learn in what danger you stand, and how I came to have assurance of it. By the earnest entreaty of the Queen, his Majesty convened the barons to meet him in council this morning; but Cochrane had been with him at an early hour, and entered the council chamber with him."

"And was not the knave arraigned by

any of the lords and charged with the crime of which all know him to be guilty?"

"Angus denounced him, and others bore testimony to the charge. His Majesty interrupted them, refused to examine their proofs, and declared he had been satisfied that morning that this charge was nothing more than the result of a conspiracy to ruin a worthy gentleman who had served him faithfully."

"What said their lordships?"

Angus answered the King that if such service as Cochrane had rendered him were accounted faithful, there was no need for his presence at the court, as he would never do the work his Majesty required of his followers. The King told him angrily to go and never to appear before him again unless specially summoned. Then Angus marched out of the chamber,

and he was followed by nearly all the barons assembled.

"Did not his Grace recall them?"

"No; he hastily dismissed the council, saying that what business he had to transact he would do without their lordships' aid."

"Was there not one near him bold enough to make an effort to stay the course of such wild folly?"

"There was one—the Queen. She implored him to recall their lordships, or at least to take time to consider what he was about to do. He replied that they were rebellious knaves, and that he was the monarch of Scotland, as he would make them understand."

"He has been goaded into this mad course by some subtle lie of the arch-traitor Cochrane."

"That is too certain. The Queen, finding

all effort to soothe him or to alter his resolution vain, begged him to set you free, and——"

"He refused?"

"Ay, refused most resolutely. Her Majesty informed me of it all, and then enabled me to obtain audience of the King."

"For what purpose?"

"There could only be one—to implore mercy for you. I knelt at the feet of his Grace and besought his clemency. He sternly answered me that you had openly defied his authority at Dumfries, that you had been party to the death of a loyal knight, and that you had been leagued with certain persons whose names were written on a tablet which had been in your possession, to disturb the peace of the realm by a rebellious attempt to dethrone his Majesty."

"It was the tablet Panther gave me. I

it will come speedily, or I read the signs of his fate badly."

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the doors to you, and you must fly hence to some place of safe hiding until the man's villainy evokes the retribution he merits. Then you may show yourself freely again."

"You will go with me?"

"No; I remain under the protection of the Queen, and when that fails, I must seek shelter in some convent."

He regarded her searchingly, and for the first time became conscious of the singular coldness of her manner. A glimmering suspicion disturbed him that there was something behind all she had said.

"It cannot be," he muttered uneasily, "that you are deceiving me in aught. It cannot be that you are trying to save my life whilst you hide from me that you have sacrificed yourself to Cochrane——"

She drew back from him with a disdainful glance.

"Forgive me," he cried, before she could

speak; "it was the doubt of a moment. It is gone, and will never ruffle my mind again. Be content, and pardon me. I will do what you wish; but you must follow me if you will not go with me."

"It cannot be," she said, stifling a sob and turning away her face. "It can never be now."

He stood dumbfoundered, staring at her and discrediting his ears. But his eyes confirmed the words which seemed to be still ringing against the walls of the dungeon and filling his soul with more despair than he had experienced even when the intimation was made to him that he had been condemned unheard and without any form of trial.

"Can never be now?" he echoed at length, pausing after each word as if trying to realize its full meaning. Then vehemently: "And why not? What act of

mine relieves you from the vows that you have pledged to me? What crime have I committed that gives you the right to turn from me? Right! No, we shall not talk of right; for love is circumscribed by no law or condition. If you ever loved me, no misfortune of mine—no guilt even—could make you renounce me."

Whilst he spoke she covered her face with her hands, and, swaying to and fro, she seemed distracted by the harrowing emotions his words conjured up.

"I loved you, Bertrand, and I love you—I can never change in that. The bitterness with which I recognize the need for our separation teaches me how much more dear to me you are than all the world. But I dare not place my hand in yours and fulfil the pledge that I have given, as I yearn to do. I dare not do it without bringing an eternal curse upon you and myself."

He was, if possible, more astounded by this strange speech than by the first. He made an effort to compose himself so that he might not add to the pain which he saw she was enduring.

"In the saints' name, Kate, read me your riddle," he said, perplexedly; "for I can make nothing of it save that some wild fantasy, and the sorrows which surround us, have disturbed your reason. If you still love me, what is there that can part us?"

He drew her hands down and attempted to take her in his arms. But she drew back from him with an exclamation that had in it something of horror.

"Must I tell you that?" she cried in passionate grief. "Oh, Bertrand, Bertrand, search your memory, and say to me then, if you can, that there is no act of yours which could render our union impious."

His lips trembled, and he was silent, for the unknown issue of the combat at the Druid's Circle haunted him.

"It was by our means that my father fell," she went on, wildly; "but that I tried to forget. I tried to deceive myself with the thought that we were blameless, and I would not let the mishap part us."

"Had he been more just to us, he would not have fallen so," said Gordon, hoarsely.

"Hush, and remember that I owed him a daughter's duty. I might have learned in time to believe that my rebellion would be pardoned; but now—the same messenger who brought the tablet containing the names of your fellow-conspirators brought also the black tidings that my brother had fallen under your hand."

"Heaven is witness that he forced the quarrel upon me with scornful menaces; and Heaven is witness that I no more than

defended my life against his furious onslaught," answered Lamington in a low, dejected tone, for he began to see the dismal barrier that had sprung up between them in spite of all his efforts to prevent it.

"You own, then, that it was your hand that robbed him of life?" she cried, piteously, as if she had entertained some vague hope that he would deny it. "Speak, and if you can, swear that this is some new trick invented by our enemies to separate us."

He could not speak. He sat down on the couch, and pressed his hand against his brow.

"Speak," she said, touching his arm, and gazing at him with eager and yet despairing eyes; "say that Nicol, who brought me the tidings, has been deceived by Cochrane, or that he is himself trying to deceive us."

"Did he say that his brother was dead?"

"Yes; he said that Richard died two days after he had been carried from the place where you had encountered him."

"Then Heaven forgive me, for my love has been the cause of bloody work."

She drew back, shuddering, and staring at him like one fascinated, as he rose slowly to his feet, with an expression of utter hopelessness on his countenance.

"Be merciful to me, and say that no man may charge you with my brother's fate, as they have charged you with my father's," she cried in pitiful suspense.

A pause, and then he turned to her sadly, but calm as one who feels that fate is victor, and further stuggle against it is useless.

"I cannot answer as you and I would wish, Katherine. I know how much is sacrificed by my confession, but even to

win you and keep you I dare not dishonour myself by a falsehood."

"Then it is all true," she moaned, clasping her hands in distress.

"It is true that we fought, and accident gave me the victory—a fatal and accursed one. It is unavailing to explain to you by what means he forced me to draw against him, and by what strange mishap he received his death-wound. All that would not make me the less responsible for his doom."

"Had you no thought of me when you stood up armed against my brother?"

"Ay—every word spoken, every blow aimed at my heart made me think of you and submit to contumely that no other man dared have cast upon me. I tried to save him by all means short of exposing my breast to his sword, and yet he fell. The dread of the tidings which you have

brought me has haunted me for days. It is over now—the worst has come, and, since you wish it, we must part. But Heaven knows how hard I strove to avert this calamity. I give up the contest now: for fate has made our love a sign of doom to all."

"One word from you and I would have placed my hand in yours, ready to fly with you wherever you might lead me. We might have fled to some far-off land where our happiness in being together would have enabled us to forget all the horrors we have been involved in here, and that one word you cannot speak."

She said this almost as if she were disappointed that he had not, rightly or wrongly, denied the truth of the accusation she herself had made against him.

"Because that one word would have been a falsehood."

"And I honour you the more, Bertrand, because you could not speak it," she replied, in faltering tones, but gazing at him proudly through her tears; "I honour you the more, although my heart will break in the separation to which your own confession condemns us."

His brave submission to the truth, when he knew how much it was to cost him—a truth which he might have dared to deny—and the sight of his despair, overcame the bitter reflections which had at first given her strength to control the turbulent emotions the thought of their parting aroused, and she sobbed piteously.

His head was bowed, and he could not look at her, for he felt as if he were the guilty cause of her misery, although he had been powerless to check the course of events which made him so; and every sigh she uttered smote him to the quick. For a

little while there was no sound in the gloomy dungeon save that of her sobs and of his half-stifled respiration.

"Oh, it is a cursed fate," he cried at length, his whole nature vehemently rebelling against the course into which they were driven by circumstances they had been unable to control; "it is cruel that we who love, and who have risked so much for its sake, should be severed because our enemies were those who should have been our truest friends. It was no fault of mine—no fault of yours that raised this fatal barrier of your brother's blood; why should we let it stand between us? Why should we not trample it underfoot and forget it?"

He seized her hands, holding them tightly in his own, as if he would keep her there in spite of every power that sought to drag her from him.

"Oh, if we *could* forget," she exclaimed, fervently, but hopelessly.

"We shall, we shall," was his passionate cry.

"We cannot," was her piteous answer; "even now, when my breast is racked by the strife of love against the instinct which my father's and my brother's spirits inspire—even now, when you seem more dear to me than ever, the touch of your hand reminds me that under it Richard fell."

Shudderingly she turned her face aside, and he dropped her hands.

"You are right, Katherine," he said, gloomily; "after the first glow of our passionate resolve to cleave to each other had faded, my every touch would make you think of him until you might learn to hate me. Better we should part in agony than live in hate. I, too, would feel the influence

of the dead, and I could not look into your sad eyes without remembering Richard Janfarie. The sacrifice must be made for your sake as much as for aught else."

"It will kill me," she moaned, growing weak as he became strong in the resolve to do what seemed right.

"No, Katherine; you will live to know that whether I am near or far away, my heart is always with you. Every thought of mine your dear image will share, and every act your sweet influence will guide. In memory, at least, you will be mine always, and that memory will be to me a beacon directing and leading me wherever noble deeds may be done to expiate my crime."

"I came here, Bertrand, so filled with horror at the thought of the ruin our love had wrought upon my nearest kin that I was calm and cold. The parting which I

came to announce seemed no more than a just punishment for the evil we had done, but now I feel that it is a sacrifice too great for me to bear."

He too felt that, but he would not show his weakness again. His heart ached cruelly, and he would have prolonged the parting indefinitely. But he wished to spare her some portion of the anguish she endured.

"I will help you, Katherine," he said, with forced calmness. "Show me how I may escape from this den and I will go at once. So long as you remain in safety, I will not cross your path again; but when danger threatens, I will be near you."

"Do not risk that—do not remain in the country; for whilst you are near me, you are within reach of Cochrane's treachery."

He bit his lip, and his brow darkened.

"Give me one promise before I go—that you will never give that man any claim over you."

"Do you need such a promise?"

"No," he answered, after an instant, in which he scrutinized her face curiously; "I do not need it, for I read your hate of him too clearly. You must seek no promise from me as to my movements, for, although I part from you, I cannot part from the hope of vengeance, which is all that his villainy has left to me."

"As you will," she murmured, miserably.

"One kiss—the last; and then—farewell."

He kissed her; and then, with the sudden coldness of a man resolved to meet the worst, he asked her to show him how he was to escape from the dungeon.

She gave him a cloak, which he donned at once. She watched him with a species

of wonder in the midst of her distress; for he had become strangely calm and firm. She did not at the moment understand that it was the very bitterness of his despair, and the parching thirst to begin the work of retaliation upon the man to whose machinations he traced all their misfortunes, that gave him the resolution and steadiness of fate itself.

"What next?" he said, with unshaken voice.

"This ring will enable us to pass the guard; after that you must make your way from the palace as opportunity may offer. If the private passage to the church is clear, you will pass forth without difficulty. Follow me, and let nothing tempt you to speak."

Having taken the lantern which the captain had left, she drew open the door of the dungeon and passed out, Gordon

keeping close behind her. He closed the door, so that no chance observation of the sentinels might discover his flight too soon.

END OF VOL. II.

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